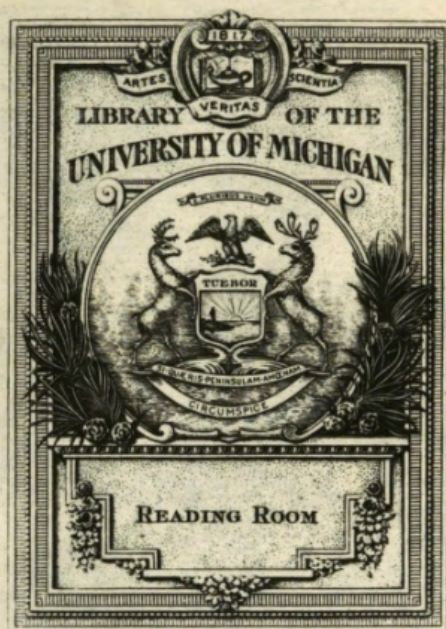


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OF THE
FRENCH NAVY
UNDER
THE FIRST REPUBLIC
FOLLOWING THE HISTORY OF THE FRENCH NAVY DURING THE AMERICAN
WAR OF INDEPENDENCE
BY
E. CHEVALIER,
CAPTAIN
PARIS
LIBRAIRIE.L. HACHETTE ET Cie
79, BOULEVARD SAINT-GERMAIN, 79
1886

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WORKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

History of the French Navy during the American Revolutionary War, preceded by a study of the French navy and its institutions, from the beginning of the 17th century to the year 1778. - Hachette.. . . Paris,

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PREFACE

In a naval war, two main actions appear. First, we see the hand of the government, which alone has the authority to draw up campaign plans or approve the projects submitted to it. Next comes the navy, whose special action is subdivided into two distinct parts: on the one hand, the preparation of naval forces, and, on the other, the conduct, at sea, of sailors of all ranks. It is from these various points of view that it is necessary to study maritime facts if we wish to judge them fairly. Apart from the role played by admirals and captains on the day of a battle, there are questions of capital importance, for example, the nature of the operations and the condition of the ships. The fortune of a well-armed fleet, both in terms of material and personnel, remains subject to the chances of war, but it can be said that it depends above all on the knowledge of its commander. With poorly armed ships, an admiral, even a skilled one, will most often be powerless to ward off disasters. A history of the navy would therefore be incomplete if it had no other objective than the battlefield.⁵

It is in the realm of ideas that we must seek the truest and at the same time most useful explanation for the defeats that followed one another from 1793 to 1799. England and the United States are not alone, as is generally believed, in possessing good sailors. Sweden, Norway, Denmark, all parts of Germany bordered by the sea, Holland, France, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece have excellent sailors. But what the various countries we have just listed rarely possess are organic naval laws, containing a mechanism that is both simple and reliable, the operation of which gives the whole the solidity without which, when war breaks out, the most capable leaders can do nothing. Therein lies the secret of power at sea, and the continual efforts of nations which are not exclusively maritime must tend to fulfill this indispensable condition. The history of the French navy, from 1793 to 1799, proves only too clearly the truth of what we are putting forward.⁶

HISTORY OF THE FRENCH NAVY UNDER THE FIRST REPUBLIC

BOOK ONE

Events of 1789. - Revolts in the ports. Powerlessness of the government. - Indulgence of the Constituent Assembly for troublemakers. - Development given to our naval forces after the American War of Independence. Reforms made by the Constituent Assembly. New organization of the naval officer corps. - Decree concerning the administration of the arsenals. Measures taken by the Legislative Assembly. Violence committed in Brest against Captain de Lajaille. - Bougainville's refusal to accept the rank of vice-admiral. - France is at war with Prussia and Piedmont.

I

A few months after the meeting of the Estates-General at Versailles, the executive branch found itself reduced to impotence. Moreover, the National Assembly, preoccupied with destroying the old social edifice, did not seem to realize that it was taking none of the necessary measures to ensure the solidity of the new order of things. The agitation that reigned in people's minds penetrated on board ships.⁷

Repeated attempts at hiring were made in all ports to ensure impunity for the revolt by depriving military leaders of the means to suppress it. Discipline had a strong foundation; it resisted for some time. However, the actions of officers, which are based not on complacency but on just severity, quickly wear thin in such circumstances. This truth was quickly demonstrated. The storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, had the immediate consequence of diminishing the authority of government agents. The municipalities, having become bolder, encroached on the responsibilities of civil and military leaders. Having departed from the law, they needed a foothold. They sought it not only among the civilian population, but also among the soldiers, sailors, and workers. The municipalities found themselves forced to work against the military leaders, with whom, at first, they seemed to want to come to an agreement. Thus, from the very beginning, the misdirection given to the necessary work of transformation that French society was pursuing was evident.

Under the conditions we have just described, the naval commanders encountered continual difficulties in the exercise of their functions. They sought orders that the ministers, lacking any authority, could not give them. In order to prevent the overexcited populations from giving way to disorder, the general officers placed in charge of the ports gave way on all points. Taking no part themselves in the questions that divided minds, they prescribed the same line of conduct to the officers. The naval commanders accepted the assistance of the national guard, into which they allowed workers from the arsenals to enter.⁸

Several of them, without having received any orders from Paris, had the troops take the national cockade and wore it themselves. These concessions, dictated by an obvious spirit of conciliation, did not have the success they deserved. The municipalities had initially interfered with reserve in naval affairs. Urged on by agitators, they intervened in all matters.

The Hôtel de Ville became the meeting place for the discontented. It was there that the soldiers and sailors, having incurred punishments, and the workers dismissed from the arsenal for their misconduct, brought their complaints. Justice, paralyzed, left the troublemakers free. These weaknesses brought a temporary calm, but new demands were soon made. When the naval commanders wanted to resist, the past was forgotten. The leaders aroused popular passions against them. The bewildered troops became defiant. The leaders soon understood that they could no longer count on their soldiers. Peace was disturbed in Le Havre, Cherbourg and Saint-Malo. Serious disorders broke out in Brest. Count Hector, lieutenant general of the naval forces, was commander of the navy in this port. He had occupied this post for nine years. His position in the city and in the arsenal was excellent. Count Hector exercised great influence over the sailors, soldiers and workers. When the first difficulties arose, he lulled himself with the hope of overcoming them. Driven by a great spirit of conciliation, he lent himself to all the steps which could ensure public peace.⁹

Captain Lelarge, director of the port, having taken some harsh action against the arsenal personnel under his command, became unpopular. He was temporarily removed.

Although he made new concessions every day, Count Hector was unable to reach an agreement with the population. If he had dealt only with the municipality, he would have succeeded, but the city of Brest was exposed to foreign influences which, in all circumstances, pushed not towards appeasement but towards disorder.

"It is very painful for me," wrote Count Hector to the minister on July 22, "to receive no orders in the position I am in. I had the honor of reporting to you the excitement in the city of Brest. It was such that, at any moment, the most terrible fire could have broken out there. The municipality and honest citizens hastened to calm it down and restore order; but unfortunately there are gathered here many foreigners and people without a name who expect their well-being only from disorder." Count Hector said to the minister in a letter dated July 24: "I have again taken the opportunity to do justice to the municipality of the city, to the honest citizens and to the desire they had to restore order, but I have not left you unaware, Monseigneur, that I was very worried about the events that a large population gathered from all sides could cause at any moment, especially since the majority of them voted for disorder and blamed the slowness with which it was brought about." Soon Count Hector had no more power than the appearance. "All my arrangements are limited until now," he wrote to the Minister of the Navy, "to everything that can ensure the preservation of the port, but I must not hide from you that the fermentation is at its highest stage."¹⁰

At every moment, we must fear that the population will indulge in the greatest excesses. Finally, this ferment is such that one might believe it is overexcited by enemies of the State who could even have agents in Brest. Looking back at the events of this period, it seems certain that the nations hostile to France used every means to add to the difficulties of our internal situation. England could not forgive us for the support we had given to the Americans. He spared no effort to foment unrest in France, and especially in the ports, which would benefit her by weakening us.

The English ambassador, Earl Dorset, made a singular communication to the Minister of the Navy at this time. An unknown person, he told him, had come to his hotel to inform him that a plot, aimed at destroying the arsenal at Brest, was to be carried out during the month of November. Was the ambassador acting in good faith? It is doubtful. No one in France entertained such a plan. If the action reported by Count Dorset had really taken place, it was the work of some schemer who had come to the ambassador's house to obtain money. In any case, the Minister of the Navy, M. de la Luzerne, thought it necessary to obtain information about this alleged plot. This affair, however carefully it was kept secret, leaked out. It increased the distrust of the population, soldiers and workers. The result was an ever-increasing interference by the municipality in the port services.¹¹

Count d'Estaing was, at this time, very popular. The government wanted to send him to Brest with the dual role of commander-in-chief of the land and naval forces. This general officer, shrinking from the difficulties of this task, refused. In Lorient and Rochefort, peace was disturbed. The naval commanders in these two ports struggled to maintain order among the troops and workers at the arsenal. The duties of naval commander were fulfilled in Toulon by squadron leader Albert de Rions. Since Suffren's death, this squadron leader was considered the most capable general officer to command a large fleet. He was, moreover, a man of extreme integrity, with a liberal and conciliatory spirit. Events would bring him into conflict with the population of Toulon.

Disorders, in which the population found themselves involved, broke out on March 23, 1789. Private properties were looted, and several people suffered mistreatment. The naval and garrison troops took up arms, but the instructions sent from Paris in case unrest broke out were so timid that the authorities did not dare use force to maintain order. The bourgeoisie, dissatisfied with the administration of the Hôtel de Ville, was in favor of the movement. It gave the riot free rein as long as only the individuals it complained about were harmed. The bourgeoisie soon realized that it was playing a dangerous game. The disorderly people, seeing the inaction of the troops, considering themselves, from then on, as sure of impunity, went beyond the limits which had been assigned to them.¹²

For a moment, it seemed as though they would commit the greatest excesses. The National Guard, frightened, called for the assistance of the troops, which it joined to prevent things from going any further. The arsenal workers were willing to take part in the movement, but the maritime authorities managed to contain them. Squadron Leader Albert de Rions reported these events to the minister in a letter from which we borrow the following passage: "The bonds of subordination, in all states, tend more and more to loosen. Weakness on one side is communicated from one side to the next, while, on the other, audacity increases and makes one capable of 'daring anything.' I have the right to assure you that authority has not been debased in my hands; but we see everywhere around us troops who only seem to take up arms to be insulted. Is it not to be feared that they will tire of such a humiliating role? Will they not allow themselves to be won over by this spirit which seems to want to bring men back to equality? Tired finally, I repeat, of obeying only to earn insults and blows which are not allowed to be returned, will not the soldier take the side of joining the mutineers whom they do not want him to repress? These are events which one must be allowed to foresee. The guarding of a naval arsenal is of great importance; the one with which I find myself charged would not give me any anxiety in ordinary times; but if the government does not replace gentleness, which is taken for weakness, with just severity, I know of nothing for which one can answer with any certainty."¹³

At the end of 1789, a new uprising, this time directed against squadron leader Albert de Rions, took place in Toulon. On December 1st, the arsenal workers gathered tumultuously to protest a decision made by the naval commander. The latter had ordered the dismissal of two masters, convicted of having preached revolt aboard ships anchored in the harbor. Squadron leader Albert de Rions, learning that the mutineers expressed a desire to speak with him, confidently went to meet them. As soon as he entered the arsenal gates, the crowd surrounded him, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he managed to reach his home. The troops, confined to their barracks, awaited orders. Despite the dangers of the situation, the municipality refused to proclaim martial law. The mayor and the public prosecutor gave the naval commander the most formal assurance that the National Guard would protect him. Wanting to avoid bloodshed, the squadron leader of Albert de Rions, who was as humane as he was brave, had a detachment of sailor gunners that had been called out withdrawn. As disorder increased and the ill will or impotence of the National Guard seemed evident, he instructed one of his officers to bring fifty soldiers from the Barois regiment to his hotel. The members of the municipality, using an argument often invoked since that time, insisted on the misfortunes that could result from a conflict between the troops and the inhabitants. The naval commander agreed to reverse this decision. As soon as he had placed himself at the discretion of the National Guard, he was seized and dragged to prison.¹⁴

D'Albert de Rions and the officers accompanying him suffered the most severe treatment during the journey; without the devotion of a few courageous men, they would have lost their lives. Such were the results of the municipality's protests. When the Constituent Assembly was informed of the events we have just reported, it ordered the release of the imprisoned officers. It also ordered an investigation into the events that had taken place on December 1 in Toulon. After raising some objections, the Toulon municipality decided to carry out the Assembly's wishes. The latter, having received, on December 21, the official news that the squadron leader d'Albert de Rions and his officers had been released from prison, declared itself "satisfied with the conduct of the president and the representatives of the commune of Toulon and the National Guard regarding the execution of this decree." The investigation prescribed by the decree of December 7 was completed in the first days of January 1790. On the 16th of the same month, the Assembly made known its opinion on the whole of this affair by a declaration of which we reproduce the terms below: "The National Assembly, presuming favorably on the motives which animated M. d'Albert de Rions, the other naval officers involved in the affair, the municipal officers and the National Guard of Toulon, declares that there is no reason for any indictment." On January 18, it issued the following decree: "The Assembly instructs its president to transmit to Mr. d'Albert de Rions the decree of the 16th and to express to him the esteem that it has never ceased to have for a warrior whose services have worthily supported the glory of the nation."¹⁵

At the same time, it instructs him to give honorable testimony to the naval officers involved in the Toulon affair; it further instructs its president to express the Assembly's satisfaction with the patriotic sentiments that the municipal officers and the National Guard of Toulon have consistently demonstrated in all circumstances. Squadron leader Glandèves replaced Mr. d'Albert de Rions in command of the navy. Assailed by the crowd, this general officer was dragged to prison, as had his predecessor. He remained there for several days before being returned to his duties.

The Assembly found, in this unfortunate event, a new opportunity to offer its congratulations to the municipality and the National Guard of Toulon. It expressed its regrets over the treatment inflicted on Mr. de Glandèves, but this squadron leader received no further satisfaction. "The National Assembly," it was stated in a decree dated March 14, 1790, "having been informed, through various letters, of the wise actions of the municipality and the National Guard of Toulon, either to restore calm or to make Mr. de Glandèves forget what had happened, has instructed its president to write to the municipality and the National Guard to express its satisfaction, and to Mr. de Glandèves to express the part it has taken, in particular, in this affair, as far as he was concerned."

On August 11, 1790, Captain de Castellet, second in command of the Toulon navy, was attacked by a band of arsenal workers. Dragged to a gallows, he would have died an ignominious death at the hands of these madmen, if some soldiers, whom chance had led there, had not freed him.¹⁶

He was taken bleeding to the hospital. The Assembly, faithful to its system, instructed its president to write to the mayor and municipal officers to express its satisfaction with the zeal and patriotism they had shown in this circumstance. Prosecution was ordered against the perpetrators of the attack on Captain Castellet. Needless to say, no further action was taken on this matter. Acts of violence of the nature we have just reported occurred in all the ports. The naval officers found themselves subjected to the most brutal treatment, and their lives were often in danger. Moreover, the conduct of the municipalities could leave them in no doubt about their situation. It was in vain that, leaving aside ranks which they nevertheless possessed in a very legitimate manner, the naval officers demanded the protection due, in civilized countries, to all citizens; they could not obtain it. "The unbridled license of the volunteers on this occasion," wrote the squadron leader Albert de Rions after the events of the end of 1789, "exceeded all limits. The old laws, the new laws were equally violated. The volunteers outraged the decrees of the National Assembly, in all that concerns the rights of man and those of the citizen. Let us not be considered here, if you wish, as officers and me in particular as the head of a respectable body, let us only be seen as quiet and irreproachable citizens, and every honest man can only be revolted by the unjust and odious treatment that we have suffered; he will join us in demanding the punishment of the guilty." This dignified, just, moderate language was not heard.¹⁷

It became clear that naval officers could count on neither the support of local authorities nor the support of the government. They were outlawed. On August 20, 1790, the Assembly promulgated a new penal code for ships. Certain provisions of the new law aroused great irritation among the crews of the Brest squadron. The first article stated that the masters would wear, as in the past, a liana as a sign of command. They were allowed to use it to punish men showing ill will in carrying out maneuvers. The commander and officers had to ensure that this right did not degenerate into abuse. Finally, irons, with a small trailing chain, were among the punishments that commanders could inflict on sailors.

Mr. d'Albert de Rions commanded the Brest squadron. Made unpopular by the events in Toulon, this general officer had been very badly received on his arrival by the municipality. However, after some talks with this all-powerful authority, the difficulties were smoothed out, and he was allowed to occupy the post that the government had entrusted to him. This general officer, who was animated by the best intentions, made the most conscientious efforts to calm tempers. He wrote to Paris to point out the dangers of the situation, and he proposed modifying the articles for which the sailors showed a strong repugnance. The Assembly, seized of the question by the minister, rejected the observations presented by the squadron leader d'Albert de Rions and the municipal officers of Brest.¹⁸

He was willing to "forget the wrongs of a few misguided men who had ignored the beneficial provisions of the Assembly's decrees, and who, mistaking the intention of some articles, had not seen how much the new code she had given them, in her paternal solicitude, was gentler and more just than the rigorous and arbitrary regime by which they were governed." But she decided that all the provisions of the law of August 23, 1790, would be implemented. A decree, whose preamble was full of consideration for sailors, was issued to this effect on September 15. The course of action being followed in Paris could not produce any results. If the Assembly wanted to maintain the decree of August 20, it had to take energetic measures to ensure its implementation. If, on the contrary, she intended to give in to the sailors' request, she should do so graciously and immediately. While the Assembly, allowing itself to be carried away by its penchant for philosophical and humanitarian dissertations, was wasting its time with vain words, the Brest squadron was in full insurrection.

On September 15, a sailor from the *Leopard*, who was on board the *Patriote*, made seditious remarks and insulted the major [adjutant] of that ship. This man was drunk. The squadron leader of Albert de Rions, to whom a complaint was made, ordered the culprit to be brought back on board. The execution of this measure, which could only be criticized for extreme indulgence, aroused, in the *Patriote*, a very strong irritation. Mr. d'Albert de Rions, informed of this state of affairs, brought before him a boat skipper who was inciting the crew of the vessel to revolt. He took the trouble to explain to this man that no punishment had been inflicted on the sailor of the *Leopard*.¹⁹

Mr. d'Albert de Rions was forced to dismiss this boatmaster who was acting very insolent. As he left, the latter said "that the strongest should make the law; that he was the strongest and that the sailor of the *Patriote* would not be punished." Captain d'Entrecasteaux, commanding the *Patriote*, made every effort to quell the sedition. Unable to succeed, he declared that if the disorder continued, he would resign his command. "So much the better!" cried a large number of men. "Long live the nation! Aristocrats to the lantern!" On the 16th, at eight o'clock in the morning, squadron leader d'Albert de Rions went aboard the *Patriote*. Surrounded by the officers, he repeated, before the assembled crew, that the sailor of the *Leopard* had not suffered any punishment. Wanting to make a last effort to save something of the discipline, M. d'Albert de Rions declared that he saw himself obliged to send to prison the coxswain, whose conduct had been very reprehensible. Until then, the crew had observed the greatest silence; but, at that moment, numerous cries of: "He will not go" were heard. Squadron leader d'Albert de Rions, having tried in vain to restore order, left the *Patriote*, saying that if, within an hour, the crew had not returned to duty, he would inform the minister of the events that had just occurred. When the time set by the squadron commander had elapsed, the situation had undergone no change. Mr. d'Albert de Rions embarked in his boat to come to an agreement with the naval commander, Lieutenant General d'Hector.

As his boat moved away, some sailors, calling out to the skipper, shouted to him:²⁰

"Capsize the boat." "I was unable," the squadron leader wrote to the minister, speaking of this incident, "to clearly identify those guilty of this insolence; it will undoubtedly be followed by many others. On board the Majestic, several soldiers refused to perform maneuver duty without punishment. In vain would I repeat to the officers that subordination still reigns; my words would hardly convince them of something of which I myself am not convinced; there is absolutely no hope except in a commission composed of members of the National Assembly. Decrees would not restore order; they would be mocked."

While the scenes of disorder we have just described were taking place on board the ships anchored in the harbor, a riot broke out in the city. The crowd rushed to the house of M. de Marigny, major general of the navy. The gallows were brought to his house, and if, by some lucky chance, he had not been absent, there was no doubt that he would have died an ignominious death. Rumor had it that a letter had been discovered in which this officer said that, if he were sent to Saint-Domingue, he would be able to bring the rebels to reason. The crowd, which demanded the death of this brave officer, had no other grievances against him. M. de Marigny, justly indignant, resigned his post; he declared that he would cease all service until he had obtained the satisfaction to which he was entitled. When these facts became known in Paris, the Assembly seemed disposed to show some vigor. But its ardor cooled very quickly, and, instead of arming the minister with sufficient powers to act with promptitude and energy, it put this matter under deliberation.²¹

On September 20, the Assembly decided that the king would be asked to issue orders "to prosecute and try, according to legal procedures, the principal perpetrators of the insurrection and those of the insult to Sieur de Marigny, Major General of the Navy; to disarm the ship *Leopard* and dismiss its crew, directing those who composed it to their respective quarters, and ordering the officers to remain in their departments." It was at least unusual to send men who had misbehaved back to their families. This kind of punishment seemed to encourage revolt. The lack of understanding of this measure could not escape the Assembly, but it no longer had the energy to suppress the disorder. Recognizing the need to remove the sailors of the *Leopard* from Brest, it had found no other solution than to dismiss them. The Assembly decided that two of its members would go to Brest. These commissioners, equipped with full powers, were charged with restoring order and discipline. While these formalities were being carried out, which betrayed the indecision of the Assembly, time was running out. The squadron leader of Albert de Rions, not seeing himself supported by the government, resigned from his command. It must be recognized that he could no longer exercise it honorably. These acts of indiscipline, which reduced our navy to impotence, were being committed at a time when we were threatened with a break with Great Britain. Serious difficulties had arisen between the courts of London and Madrid. If the struggle began between these two countries, France could not escape the necessity of taking part in the war. All the nations of Europe were building up armaments.²²

The government had secured the necessary funds to equip forty-five ships of the line and a proportional number of frigates and small vessels. It was in such circumstances that the Assembly watched impassively as the navy was disorganized. Squadron Leader de Souillac, whose flag was on the *Auguste*, replaced M. d'Albert de Rions, who had left on October 15. On the 22nd of the same month, M. de Souillac, finding the burden too heavy, wrote to the minister to request leave. Squadron Leader Bougainville was called to command the Brest squadron. The commissioners appointed by the decree of September 20 arrived in Brest during the month of October. After appearing on board the ships of the squadron, in the company of some of the members of the municipality, they believed, or rather they pretended to believe, that they had restored calm to the minds of the people. "The sailors," they wrote to the naval committee, "in an outpouring of the liveliest joy, have protested their attachment to their staffs, to their captains. Everywhere one heard this cry of joy: Long live the nation, the law, the king! All commands are now being executed with the greatest precision; finally, we hope that the squadron will soon be as all good citizens desire." These were only empty words. Not only had the commissioners obtained nothing, but they had not dared to give the order to pursue the authors of the insurrection of September 15. The Assembly was fully aware of what was happening in Brest; On the other hand, she could not delude herself about the sincerity of the repentance shown by the crews. However, she wanted to reward the sailors for what she called their submission.²³

It decided that the two articles that had aroused their sensitivities would be repealed. The commissioners, anxious to establish that they had successfully fulfilled their mission, had sent to the naval committee two addresses delivered by the crews of the ships *Superbe* and *America* to the Society of Friends of the Constitution. The sailors of the *Superbe* declared that nothing henceforth could alter the patriotic feelings that the actions and speeches of the commissioners had imprinted in their hearts. They swore to be faithful to the nation, the law, and the king, and to defend the national flag to the death. Finally, they promised to love their leaders, to obey them, and to "reject from their midst all those who would perjure their oath." The sailors of the *America* showed no less enthusiasm or less ardor for good. "They could not," they said, "hear the speeches of the commissioners and those of their fellow citizens without being deeply moved by them; it was, for them, the voice of the Fatherland saying to them: our colonies are lost, our navy is destroyed; the safety of the kingdom is compromised. When these cries resounded in the souls of the French, could they refuse to the Fatherland what it demanded of them?" The language that the agitators made the sailors use, compared to that of the commissioners, allows us to see the chimerical world in which we lived. Everything happened in vain words. Neither the commissioners nor the sailors meant what they said.

The new commander-in-chief of the squadron, Rear Admiral Bougainville, arrived in Brest at the beginning of November. On the 11th, he hoisted his flag on the *Majestueux*. The spirit of indiscipline had not disappeared.²⁴

A new insurrection broke out on the *America*. Supported by the municipality and assured of the cooperation of the various political societies of Brest, Bougainville went aboard this vessel. He was accompanied by a detachment of soldiers, taken from among those who could still be relied upon. He had seventeen men, considered the most guilty, seized and sent ashore. Order, temporarily restored by this example, was soon disturbed. Seditions followed one after another. In an order of the day, dated 26 December, Bougainville reproached the crews of his squadron for "murmurs, refusals of service, insults spoken to superiors, even by highly paid sailors, even by petty officers who should, in everything, be the model of subordination that the sailors owed to themselves. These numerous and too sad examples, he added, proved that minds, which had been believed to have temporarily gone astray, were still and were perhaps incorrigibly infected with the poison of insubordination." If this situation had continued, Bougainville, despite the legitimate popularity he enjoyed, would have lost all authority over his crews. Like Messrs. d'Albert de Rions and de Souillac, he would have been forced to resign his command. The disarmament of the squadron, which the minister ordered at the beginning of January 1791, put an end to the difficulties of his position. England had given the governments of France and Spain the most peaceful assurances. The three powers had decided to put their naval forces back on a peace footing.²⁵

II

After the conclusion of the peace treaty signed at Versailles on September 20, 1783, Louis XVI and his ministers had resolved to develop our naval forces to enable them to sustain, without too much disadvantage, a new struggle with the English navy. It was to be feared that the court of London, remembering our participation in the revolt of its colonies, would take advantage of any favorable circumstance to take its revenge. Several years passed during which the reforms that should be introduced into the various naval services were studied. It was not lost sight of the fact that, during the course of the last war, we had encountered the greatest difficulties in training the staffs of our ships. If it had been easy to appoint lieutenant generals, squadron leaders and ship captains, it had not been possible to fill the vacancies created by death, illness or promotion among the officers of the rank of ship lieutenant and ensign. It was sought to prevent the return of this state of affairs.²⁶

An ordinance of January 1, 1786, increased the new naval personnel to the following numbers: one hundred ship captains, including twenty-seven division commanders; one hundred ship majors, six hundred and eighty ship lieutenants, and eight hundred and forty second lieutenants. The ship captains, division commanders, ranked with the army brigadiers; the ship captains with the colonels; the ship majors with the lieutenant colonels; the ship lieutenants with the infantry majors; the one hundred most senior second lieutenants with the infantry captains, and the others with the infantry lieutenants. The number of vice-admirals, lieutenant generals, and squadron commanders was not limited. Recruitment for the fleet staff was based on new principles. The guards disappeared to make way for naval students. The latter received extremely serious practical instruction. Embarked on corvettes specially assigned to this service, they had no command over any member of the crew. The students kept watch and were employed in the same maneuvers as the sailors. They became lieutenants of the ship after having undergone examinations and fulfilled certain conditions of embarkation. "I have read," wrote La Pérouse to Suffren, "the new ordinance. I swear to you that I find it perfect and that I would like, as with the Ark of the Lord, it to be forbidden, by law, to touch it for at least two centuries after the first year when some ministerial letters of interpretation might be necessary. I found naval guards there raised to be sailors." La Pérouse said a little further: "The harsh education given to these young people will perhaps make them a little rough, but never proud and they will have more character for it."²⁷

Navy volunteers were created from among whom sub-lieutenants of the ship were to be selected, if not entirely, then at least in part. Each inspection of classes contained a register containing the names of young men designated to serve as volunteers on government vessels. Only "the sons of gentlemen or sub-lieutenants of the ship or port and the sons of wholesale merchants, shipowners, captains, merchants, and people living in the nobility" were included in this register. After passing examinations and sailing for a specified period, volunteers could be appointed sub-lieutenants of the ship. Merchant captains who, without having volunteered, distinguished themselves in their profession were presented to the minister for this rank by the naval councils. The regular advancement of volunteers stopped at the rank of second lieutenant. However, they could be appointed lieutenants following a brilliant action or for exceptional services. They were then in the same situation as officers from the naval cadets and their careers were no longer limited. Most of the officers who had fought in the American War of Independence as fireship captains or auxiliary officers, and who had conducted themselves honorably, were admitted to the military navy. All these provisions, if we take into account the ideas that dominated at that time, were imbued with a liberal spirit. The minister created a corps of port officers, including directors, deputy directors, lieutenants and second lieutenants of port. The construction engineers, with the titles of directors, deputy directors, engineers and sub-engineers were responsible for the construction service.²⁸

Artillery officers, mostly from the colonial artillery, were placed in charge of artillery directorates in the ports. The supervision of forges, foundries, and weapons factories belonging to the navy was part of their responsibilities. The naval construction and artillery directorates, placed under the immediate command of a squadron leader, bearing the title of director general, remained subject, as required by the 1776 ordinance, to the authority of the naval commander. The construction council, which dated from Colbert, was maintained. It took the name of the naval council. Masters of all professions were kept in the ports, ready to embark. The maritime registration, the solid foundation on which France's naval power is based, underwent significant improvements.

An ordinance of October 30, 1784, reestablished the system and police of classes. It enshrined provisions whose necessity had been demonstrated by experience. Changes were made to the order established by the 1680 ordinance for the levies of seafarers. The new ordinance determined the pensions of registered sailors as well as those of the widows and children of sailors who died in the service of the State. Advances deducted from the salaries of seafarers embarked on warships and paid by the navy to their families were henceforth to protect them from want. The inspection of classes was entrusted to naval officers. A corps of gunners-sailors was created, divided into nine divisions. Each of them was composed of 170 men. The troops called upon to compose the garrisons of the ships were reorganized.²⁹

Our entire naval force consisted of eighty-two vessels and seventy-four frigates or corvettes divided into nine squadrons. Our fleets, having no ports of call in the English Channel, had always hesitated to engage in this sea. This situation made it impossible to believe that the plan for a French army to land on the coast of Great Britain could ever be realized. The government resolved to create a port at Cherbourg. Work on the construction of the dike began in 1784.

In 1787, it seemed likely that the French navy would once again appear on the battlefield. War with England seemed imminent. Suffren was called to command the Brest squadron. Enthusiasm among the officers was high. But soon the difficulties that arose between the two nations smoothed out. Since the reign of Louis XIV, the French navy had not known such a degree of prosperity. Such was the situation bequeathed by the regime that was disappearing. We will now examine the maritime institutions given to France by the Constituent Assembly. This Assembly adopted, on April 29, 1791, a bill that destroyed the basis on which the organization of the fleet staff rested. The students and volunteers, created by the ordinance of 1786, disappeared. A competitive examination, which young people between the ages of fifteen and twenty, intending to enter the navy, could apply, was opened each year in the principal maritime cities. Those who passed this examination were immediately embarked on state vessels as midshipmen. After a period of three years, they were dismissed from the service.³⁰

All sailors with four years of navigation experience on warships or merchant ships were eligible to sit the competitive examinations established to obtain the rank of ensign. Lieutenants were chosen from among ensigns, whether or not they were ensigns, and captains from among lieutenants. However, an ensign, not under maintenance, could be appointed captain. General officers, captains, and lieutenants formed a corps solely intended for the service of the State. Schools were abolished. Thus, according to the new organization, the naval staff was recruited from the merchant navy. During the discussion of the law, these provisions were the subject of very lively debates. The Assembly included former officers in its ranks. Several of them spoke out to oppose the project of the naval committee. They explained with as much talent as energy the dire consequences that its adoption would entail for the power of our country. M. Malouet, deputy of Riom, former intendant of the navy, delivered a sensible, conciliatory, liberal speech, which had no effect on the minds of the majority. "The training of young officers," said M. Malouet, "has greatly improved over the past twenty years; to a very extensive theory has been added the practice of nautical maneuvers and the necessity of a number of years of navigation to advance from grade to grade. The examiners of the students are chosen from among the most distinguished scholars, and their course of study embraces the different parts of the abstract sciences."³¹

I do not believe it is useful to change anything in this regard, especially since you have recognized the need to respect, in the army, similar institutions for the artillery and engineers, and to open, in the infantry as in the cavalry, different paths to emulation and advancement. Some must reach the ranks through the diligent practice of military exercises in subordinate positions; others, through more careful instruction, through cultivated and more promptly developed talents, must precede them. It is abusive to grant this favor to one class of men; it is essential to ensure it to a class of instruction and talent. I say more: as there can be no army without discipline, as discipline consists essentially in an inviolable subordination, if we succeed in destroying this moral subordination of uncultivated minds to the enlightenment and presumed capacity of those who command them, there will no longer be an army, because we will never see an army of scholars or philosophers." Major de Nompère de Champagny and Lieutenant de Lacoudraye spoke to combat the bill. M. de Lacoudraye ended his speech by saying: "The committee's bill contains unjust provisions, others harmful to the public service; it is inadmissible in all its parts. The time will come when enthusiasm will cease, when we will be judged on our works. When lawyers have made a mistake in the wording of some points of jurisprudence, it will be said: They were mistaken, however their intention was good. But if lawyers and merchants had drawn up a military naval organization against the feelings and demands of the military and sailors, one would say bitterly: How could they not have been mistaken!"³²

One would recall with irony the famous adage: "Ne sutor ultra crepidam."* Return, gentlemen, to the true and universal system, the only good one, that of having an exclusively military state navy. This peroration was a little harshly frank, but the severity it contained was deserved. Time has passed, and impartial history must recognize that intelligence, knowledge, and sound views were on the side of the opponents. Service on warships requires special knowledge that can only be acquired on these same vessels. The encounters between the great fleets, which took place from 1778 to 1783, had demonstrated the full importance of squadron maneuvers. How could it be admitted, given the provisions of the decree of April 29, that officers would now be able to train in the practice of these developments! What traditions, and we know what strength they give to a military corps, could officers recruited under the conditions of the new law have?

For a long time already, maritime nations, considering war at sea to be a difficult art, had deemed it necessary to provide special training to young men destined to form the general staff of their military fleet. By virtue of what particular experience were we deviating from the path followed by our rivals? One must read the decree of April 29 in its entirety to realize the errors that an all-powerful Assembly can commit when it lacks the wisdom to leave the solution of certain questions to specialized men.

The corps of naval officers, abolished on May 1, was reorganized on the 15th. The titles of lieutenant general and squadron leader disappeared.³³

*Latin: Don't let the cobbler go beyond the edge. I.e.: one should do the work one is expert at, and not try to interfere in, or do, that of others.

There were admirals, vice-admirals, rear-admirals, ship captains, lieutenants, and ensigns. The corresponding ranks in the army were Marshal of France, Lieutenant General, Field Marshal, Colonel, Captain, and Lieutenant. However, the first two hundred ship lieutenants held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. The new formation included officers from the old navy, class officers, port officers, second lieutenants, volunteers, masters, former fireship captains, merchant captains, and a privateer captain, Dalbarade. In a decree of 21 September 1791, concerning the administration of ports, the Assembly sought to give naval officers a completely erased role. One might have thought that it was seeking ways to create a navy without sailors. It was said that the administration of ports would be civil and incompatible with any military function. The general management of all works, supplies, accounting of all expenses, general police and the classes of jurisdiction was entrusted, in each major port, to a single administrator who took the title of ordonnateur. The new law not only placed the works, but, which seems more difficult to believe, the movements of the port under the direction of an administrator. After having given this new proof of its complete ignorance in matters of maritime organization, the Constituent Assembly disappeared from the scene. The Legislative Assembly did not safeguard the interests of the navy any better than the Constituent Assembly. In a decree of September 28, relating to the reorganization of the offices of the ministry, the new Assembly showed the spirit which animated it.³⁴

Officers were systematically excluded from all positions. The ports and arsenals, and the movements of the naval forces, which had been directed with such brilliance during the American Revolutionary War by Captain de Fleurieu, were abandoned to a civil servant. Since 1786, we had nine divisions of gunners and sailors. The Assembly abolished them and created, to replace them, a naval artillery corps. The companies of gunners and sailors were placed, on land and at sea, under the command of naval officers. With the new organization, the men called upon to fire cannons on our ships were commanded by artillery officers. This measure, which was unjustified, seriously undermined the military value of our fleet. The disorder and indiscipline that reigned in the ports were not repressed with more energy than under the previous Assembly. The same indulgence continued to cover attacks against persons. Captain de Lajaille, appointed to command the ship *Duguay-Trouin*, bound for Saint-Domingue, arrived in Brest in November 1791. Some agitators having spread the rumor that this officer was animated by hostile feelings towards the new order of things, a riot broke out. Without the devotion of some brave people, this captain of the ship would have been killed. It was necessary, to save him, to lock him up in a fort.

The minutes of the disturbances that occurred on this occasion were sent to the Legislative Assembly by the members of the municipality of Brest. They read them to the Assembly on December 3.³⁵

A deputy, Mr. (the *Moniteur* does not refer to him otherwise), accused the government of provoking these popular riots by designating "suspect and disparaged" agents for employment in the colonies. He pitied not Mr. de Lajaille but the administrative corps, the National Guard, and the regular troops, exposed, he said, to serious dangers in defending the enemies of the constitution. Thus, in the conflict that had just occurred, the culprit was the ship's captain, who had come to Brest, in execution of the minister's orders, to fulfill a position commensurate with his rank. The crowd, however, had made no mistake. If it had attacked Mr. de Lajaille, it must be concluded that the minister had erred in choosing this officer to command the *Duguay-Trouin*. The speaker invited the government to be more circumspect in the appointment of officers and officials called upon to serve in the colonies. Finally, he asked that naval officers absent from their posts be replaced. This deputy betrayed, in closing, the secret desires of the Assembly. The latter wanted everything that had belonged to the old naval corps to disappear. The minister, in his reply, first of all urged the Assembly to receive with reserve the accusations directed against the principal agents of the executive power. The dignity of the Assembly, he said, requires that its sanctuary not be an asylum open to all calumnies, to all imputations intended to excite the people against their true defenders. Turning to the appointment of Mr. de Lajaille to the command of the *Duguay-Trouin*, he pointed out to the Assembly that, having been placed at the head of the department for a short time, he could not personally know all the officers. Their services and the opinion of the heads of the marine corps dictated his decisions.³⁶

As for M. de Lajaille, he still did not know what could be held against this officer. In accordance with precedents, the perpetrators of the disturbances that had broken out in Brest were not prosecuted. Furthermore, the Assembly released M. de Lajaille. However, this officer lost his command, which was given to Captain Trogoff de Kerlessi, who had been highly recommended by the municipality of Brest.

The situation of naval officers in Toulon was more serious than in the northern ports. A band of wretches exercised unlimited authority in this city. In July 1792, when the department's administrators showed some signs of resistance, a riot broke out. Seized by the rioters, they were either hacked to death or hanged. Anyone who had any property, landowners, merchants, and traders large and small, were considered aristocrats. Their homes and shops were looted. Those who attempted to oppose these acts of brigandage were massacred. The naval commander, Possel, a seventy-year-old man, was dragged from his home and dragged under a street lamp. He was about to be hanged, and already had the rope around his neck when a man he had forced, who had become an influential Jacobin, saved him.

The Rear Admiral of the Fleet had been serving as commander of the navy since the beginning of 1790. Treacherously lured to the gate of the arsenal on September 10, 1792, he was seized by these madmen. Seeing the fate that awaited him, the Rear-Admiral of the Fleet, snatching a rifle from the hands of a soldier, defended himself with the greatest energy. Succumbing under the numbers, he fell covered in wounds; he was hanged from a street lamp.³⁷

Captains Désidery, Sacqui des Thourets, and Rochemaure were massacred. Thus perished officers who had remained in France despite the difficulties of their situation and the disgust they were subjected to. There were troops in Toulon, but the municipality, in collusion with the scoundrels whose crimes we have just recalled, did not allow those who commanded them to intervene.

There was no longer any government. The Assembly, which had concentrated all powers in its hands, used them only for partisan interests. The violence committed against naval officers, the attacks against their persons, brought no severity upon the heads of the guilty. This impunity kindled illegitimate covetousness in the minds of many people. Troubles were fomented in the ports to force officers to leave and take their places. Bougainville, appointed vice-admiral in a new organization of the navy which took place at the beginning of 1792, wrote to the minister: "Sir, I have received the letter which you did me the honor of writing and the list of the new formation of the navy. My duty towards the fatherland makes it a law for me not to accept an eminent rank which would be a title without function. Military discipline, this holy discipline, without which a naval army cannot exist, is annihilated. A general officer could not act without collaborators, and I seek in vain those who combine theory with the science of army maneuvers and the practice of combat. After a long patience on their part, the repeated excesses of an insubordination consecrated by impunity have distanced them from the scene of their work."³⁸

Please, Sir, be the interpreter of my feelings to the King. I will be very unhappy if I cannot devote my last days to the service of my country and end my career as I began it." Could a more severe criticism be made of the Assembly's conduct? No phrase, no sophism of language can prevail against this judgment.

On board ships serving in the colonies or stationed on foreign coasts, there was no less disorder than in our ports. Captains and officers were forced to return to France because the crews refused to obey them. Acts of indiscipline were joined by scenes of violence and even murder. Captain Macnémara, commanding a ship off the Isle of France, was killed in a military uprising. The indiscipline of the crews had very serious consequences in India. The English, at war with Tippoo-Saïb, displayed extreme arrogance in their relations with our merchant navy. They accused the French ships of carrying arms and ammunition to their enemies. We constantly had to complain about the violent or illegal practices that the British cruisers used towards our merchant vessels.

During the month of November of 1791, the thirty-two-gun frigate, the *Résolue*, captained by Callamand, set sail from Mahé, one of our trading posts, accompanying two French ships that were heading for the coast. The forty-gun English frigates, the *Phénix* and the *Persévérance*, anchored off Tellicherry, sighted our ships. They set sail and maneuvered to join them.³⁹

Arriving a short distance away, one of the frigates fired a first shot from a cannonball, then a second in the direction of our ships. Captain Callamand responded shot for shot without deviating from his course. However, seeing that the frigates continued their pursuit, he hauled off with the intention of asking the English for an explanation for their strange behavior. Sir Richard Strachan, captain of the *Phénix*, sent a boat aboard the *Résolue* to inform Captain Callamand that he had orders to visit the ships under his escort. The *Persévérance*, which had not reduced sail, fired several cannon shots at the two merchant ships to force them to haul off. Captain Callamand fired a shot from a cannon at the bow and another at the stern of the *Persévérance*, thus showing that he would oppose by force the visit of the ships he was convoying. Shortly after, an English boat came alongside one of the merchant ships. Breaking off the talks he had started with Sir Richard Strachan, Captain Callamand sent his broadside to the *Phénix*. The *Persévérance*, abandoning the merchant ships, came to join its convoy to fight the French frigate. The fight was unequal since the *Résolue*, of thirty-two, was opposed by two frigates of forty. After an engagement which lasted about thirty minutes, the *Résolue* hailed that it was bringing. It had twelve killed and fifty-six wounded. The captain was among the latter. Sir Richard Strachan invited the French captain to re-hoist his flag and continue on his way.

Captain Callamand formally refused this request. Considering himself a prisoner of war, he wished to remain aloof from any decision concerning his ship.⁴⁰

The *Résolue* was taken to Tellicherry. A few days later, the French frigate, manned by an English crew and accompanied by the *Persévérance*, sailed to Mahé. As soon as it anchored, the English, embarking in their boats, joined the *Persévérance*, which was waiting for them offshore. The commander of the French station, the Chief of Division of Saint-Félix, upon learning of these events, arrived at Mahé. By his order, the flag was re-hoisted aboard the *Résolue*. Mr. de Saint-Félix complained in strong terms to the commander of the English station, Commodore Cornwallis, of the insult to our flag by Captain Sir Richard Strachan. He warned the commodore that any further aggression would not only be repelled by force but would also be followed by reprisals. The commander of the French station soon realized that it would be difficult for him to conform his conduct to his words. The crews of the *Cybèle* and the *Résolue* declared that they would only fight if attacked. The division commander at Saint-Félix sent the *Résolue* back to France. He himself left; he could no longer uphold the rights and dignity of his country in those waters. The two station commanders brought the events we have just related to the attention of their governments. The court in London gave us apparent satisfaction by putting Sir Richard Strachan on trial. Needless to say, this officer suffered no disgrace. In the first days of September 1792, rumors spread in Guadeloupe that a counter-revolution had taken place in France. The station buildings and the land flew the white flag. Martinique followed this example.⁴¹

Shortly after this event, Generals Rochambeau and Collot, appointed first governor of the Windward Islands and second governor of Guadeloupe, arrived in the Antilles on the frigate *Sémillante*, which was escorting ships carrying troops. Threatened with being repulsed by force if they attempted to land, the two generals went to Santo Domingo with the *Sémillante* and the convoy. When it became known in Martinique and Guadeloupe that there had been no royalist movement in France, the two colonies rose up in rebellion. The tricolor was re-hoisted. The most compromised individuals fled to neighboring islands. The ship *Ferme*, the frigate *Calypso*, and the corvette *Maréchal-de-Castries* sailed to the island of Trinidad. Division Commander Rivière left these three vessels in the hands of the Spanish government.

Such was the situation of the navy in our ports, in the colonies, and abroad when the course of events led our naval forces to take part in the struggle. France had declared war on Austria on April 20, 1792. Two months later, Prussia, bound by a secret treaty, joined that power. At the end of the year, our troops having invaded Piedmont, the Mediterranean squadron received the order to sail.⁴²

BOOK II

Rear Admiral Truguet supports the army's operations against Nice and Villefranche. - Latouche-Tréville in Naples. - Sardinian Expedition. - Occupation of Saint-Pierre Island and the Saint-Antioche Peninsula. - Reunion of the naval forces under the command of Admiral Trugnet. - The French squadron anchors off Cagliari. - Arrival of the convoy. - The troops are put ashore in the Bay of Salines. - Shameful flight of the Marseille volunteers. - Re-embarkation of the army. - Losses suffered by the squadron. - Decrees concerning the navy. - Declaration of war on England and Holland. - Speech by Jean-Bon Saint-André. - This representative's opinion on the organization of the fleet personnel. - Spain, Portugal, Germany and the Two Sicilies join the coalition against the Republic. - Armaments at Brest. - Representatives sent on a mission to this port. - Vice-Admiral Morard de Galle is sent to the coast of Brittany to protect our trade and prevent the English from giving aid to the Vendéens. - Rear-Admiral Trogoff replaces Admiral Truguet in command of the Toulon squadron; difficulties of his situation. - Indiscipline of the crews. - Conduct of the Toulon authorities towards the naval officers. Events which occurred in Paris on 31 May and 2 June. - The Jacobin party is overthrown at Toulon. - The general committee enters into negotiations with the commander of the naval forces of Great Britain in the Mediterranean. - Attitude of the staffs and crews of the Toulon squadron. - Lord Hood and Admiral Langara anchor in the harbor with the forces under their command. - The Republican army lays siege to Toulon. - The English send four ships and six thousand sailors back to the ports of northern France. - Attack on the position known as Little Gibraltar. - Retreat of the Allies. - Fifteen thousand people flee with the English. - Fire started in the arsenal by Sydney Smith. Entry of conventional troops into the city. - Reprisals taken against the inhabitants.

I

Rear-Admiral Truguet left Toulon on September 20, 1792, with the following vessels: the eighty-gun *Tonnant*, the *Commerce-de-Bordeaux*, the *Scipion*, the *Lys*, and the seventy-four-gun *Centaure*.⁴³

This squadron was to support the operations of French troops on the coast of Italy and ensure the security of our commerce. Admiral Truguet contributed to the surrender of Nice and Villefranche. On October 23, he appeared before Oneille, a small port located on the coast of Genoa, which served as a refuge for a large number of privateers. A boat from the Tonnant, heading towards the shore with the parliamentary flag, was met with gunfire. Messrs. Isnard, ensign, d'Aubermesnil, infantry officer, and five sailors were killed. There were several wounded, among them Captain Duchayla. The disloyalty of the inhabitants received the punishment it deserved. The squadron opened fire on Oneille. After a vigorous cannonade, soldiers and sailors were put ashore, completing the work of destruction begun by the ships' artillery. The troops that had taken part in this expedition were escorted back to Villefranche, and Admiral Truguet went to Genoa.

The diplomatic agent of the government of the Two Sicilies in Constantinople had, in concert with the ambassadors of Prussia and Austria, taken very active steps to obtain that the Sultan refuse to recognize the envoy of the French Republic. Captain Latouche-Tréville was charged with requesting compensation for this insult. The forces under his command amounted to ten ships and two frigates. Latouche-Tréville appeared at the entrance to the Bay of Naples on December 16, 1792.⁴⁴

The harbor captain, sent to meet him, declared that his entry into the harbor with a force greater than six ships would be considered an act of hostility. Ignoring this observation, the French commander anchored, with all his ships, under the walls of the palace. The squadron, in full readiness, was ready to fire on the city. Before leaving Genoa for Naples, Latouche-Tréville had taken on board his ship an agent of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, named Belleville. The latter, dressed in a grenadier's uniform, went ashore. He was charged with delivering to the King of Naples a letter in which Commander Latouche-Tréville requested, on behalf of the French Republic, the disavowal of Sir William Ludolf, envoy of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies to Constantinople, and his immediate recall. He warned the King that he had orders to consider the refusal to grant us this satisfaction as equivalent to a declaration of war. If, within an hour, he had no reply, or if the one he received was unfavorable, the squadron would open fire on the city.

Belleville, accompanied by the Minister of the French Republic to the Government of the Two Sicilies, went to the palace. The letter he was carrying was delivered to Ferdinand IV. The court of Naples deemed it prudent to grant all the satisfactions requested of it. Prime Minister Acton wrote, by order of the king, to Latouche-Tréville to assure him that Mr. William Ludolf would be immediately recalled. He added that an important figure in Neapolitan diplomacy would go to Paris to renew the disavowal inflicted on the conduct of the Minister of the Two Sicilies at the Ottoman Porte and to consolidate the good harmony existing between the court of Naples and the French Republic.⁴⁵

Commander Latouche-Tréville put to sea the following night to join Admiral Truguet. Communications with the mainland had been limited to the exchange of letters cited above. A few days after leaving the Bay of Naples, our ships were attacked by a west-northwest gale that scattered them. The *Languedoc*, sailed by Commander Latouche-Tréville, lost its foremast on the night of the 20th, and its mainmast and mizzenmast on the 21st. This vessel was loose and taking on water from all sides. Two vessels, the *Scipion* and the *Entreprenant*, were the only ones in sight. As soon as the weather permitted, the *Entreprenant* gave the *Languedoc* the tow. The breeze having freshened, the tow broke. The winds having established themselves in the southwest, Latouche-Tréville saw himself in the necessity, whatever his repugnance for this break, of heading for Naples. It was not possible to take the tows again; moreover, the violence of the rolling was such that they had to abandon the idea of setting up a makeshift mast. The *Languedoc* made its way pushed by the wind and the sea. The *Scipion* received the order to rally Admiral Truguet to inform him of the dispersion of the squadron and the position of the ship commanded by Latouche-Tréville. On the 23rd and 24th the wind blew violently, making the situation of the *Languedoc* very dangerous, as the heavy sea was carrying it to the coast. On the night of the 24th, the rudder bar broke. A replacement bar was fitted; it also broke. At four o'clock in the morning, the ship, stranded on the island of Capri, was in danger of being lost, body and goods. The weather was dark, but by the flashes of lightning, land could be seen, which was very close.⁴⁶

Languedoc could not count on the *Entreprenant*, which had disappeared during the night. Latouche-Tréville's ship had the good fortune to escape the peril that threatened it. Rounding the island of Capri, at a stone's throw's distance, it reached the harbor of Naples. The most eager offers of help were made by King Ferdinand's ministers. Latouche-Tréville accepted only what was strictly necessary to put his ship in a condition to reach Toulon.

The government having decided that an expedition would be directed against Sardinia, the Minister of the Navy ordered Rear-Admiral Truguet to go to Ajaccio with the ships *Tonnant* and *Centaure*, each eighty, *Apollon* and *Vengeur*, each seventy-four, and the frigates *Isis*, *Vestale*, *Sensible*, *Fortunée* and *Aréthuse*. The arrival of this division was marked by an unfortunate event. *Vengeur* ran aground and it was not possible to raise it. Admiral Truguet was to, according to the instructions sent to him, embark, in Corsica, fifteen hundred soldiers and an equal number of men belonging to the National Guard. He was also warned that he would be joined in Ajaccio by a convoy bringing several battalions of the Italian army and six thousand volunteers from Marseille. Finally, Latouche-Tréville was ordered to join him after completing his mission in Naples. The month of December passed without Admiral Truguet receiving the reinforcements announced by the government. We know what had happened to Latouche-Tréville's division. The convoy had left Marseille under the escort of the ship *Commerce-de-Bordeaux*, with one hundred and twenty guns, commanded by Captain Saint-Julien.⁴⁷

After a few days of sailing, it was dispersed by a gale. The crews of the ships anchored in Ajaccio harbor caused further difficulties through their conduct. The sailors, over whom the officers had no influence, engaged in the most serious disorder on land. Two Corsicans, belonging to the National Guard, were hanged by the sailors and soldiers of the squadron.

The inhabitants of Ajaccio, exasperated by the violence they witnessed daily, refused to take part in the Sardinian expedition. It was necessary to abandon the National Guard battalions on which they were counting. "The dispositions of the fleet and the troops are very good," wrote one from Ajaccio on December 31, 1792; "one can only say that there is not enough discipline there. One of these days, a man was almost hanged who, the next day, was found completely innocent of what the agitators accused him of. This lesson, however, was not lost on the sailors; for, seeing the false steps some professional hangers are leading them into, they denounced one who will be expelled from the fleet. It is unfortunate that there is not more severe justice for these hangers who make a game of murder and an honor of boasting about it. One can imagine the bad effect that such conduct would produce in a foreign country." The *Moniteur universel* of January 27, 1793 reproduced this letter.

In the first days of January 1793, the *Leopard*, of seventy-four, belonging to the Latouche-Tréville division, appeared before Cagliari. Its commander, Captain Bourdon-Grammont, not seeing any French ship, came to drop anchor before the island of Saint-Pierre on the southwest coast of Sardinia.⁴⁸

This point had been designated as a rendezvous point in the event of separation. Latouche-Tréville was to take the necessary measures to secure this position if he reached this anchorage first. He had communicated the commander-in-chief's instructions to his captains. On January 8, the captain of the *Leopard*, having learned that part of Carlo-Forte's garrison had fled, ordered the town to surrender. It immediately opened its gates. The town of Carlo-Forte and two small citadels defending it were occupied by a detachment from the *Leopard*. Admiral Truguet arrived in the harbor of Saint-Pierre Island on January 13. He had left Ajaccio with three ships, some frigates and bombards. The commander of the *Commerce-de-Bordeaux* had orders to join him with the transport ships as soon as he managed to gather them. Admiral Truguet seized the Saint-Antioche peninsula. A few days later, the ships of the Latouche-Tréville division, with the exception of the *Languedoc* and the *Entreprenant*, having rallied to his flag, he surrendered with all his forces before Cagliari. The Sardinians repelled, with gunfire, a boat from the squadron which was heading towards the port with the parliamentary flag. The admiral, to punish this act of bad faith, had the city subjected to twelve hours of bombardment. On February 2, transport vessels, on which were 4,500 Marseille volunteers, appeared in the harbor. All arrangements for the landing were made. Several days passed during which the weather did not permit the project to be carried out.⁴⁹

The *Languedoc* and the *Entreprenant* joined the army in the first days of February. Latouche-Tréville had been rewarded for the success of his mission in Naples with the rank of rear admiral. On the 14th, the troops landed in Salines Bay, under the protection of the *Aréthuse*, the *Vestale*, and the *Junon*. These frigates had anchored within gunshot of land. Admiral Truguet, who had come to anchor at this point with a few ships, disembarked first and led this operation himself. By nightfall, General Casabianca was ashore with about 4,500 men and sixteen cannons. The Marseille volunteers formed the largest part of the landing force. On February 15, the troops marched forward. On the same day, the ships of the squadron, deployed from east to west, bombarded the fortifications established on Cape Elie and the batteries defending the city. On the 16th, the ship *Commerce-de-Bordeaux* arrived off Cagliari with some transport ships. The admiral ordered that the soldiers embarked on these ships, as well as the garrisons of the ships, be put ashore in the evening to the west of Cape Elie. These troops were to take from behind a redoubt that General Casabianca intended to attack from the front. As the bad weather did not allow the landing to take place, the general postponed the planned attack until the following day. The following night, his troops, seized by panic, abandoned their posts and fled to the shore. The efforts made by the officers to bring these demoralized soldiers back to the enemy were in vain.⁵⁰

The Marseille volunteers loudly demanded to return to the ships, and their threatening attitude indicated that they would deal a disservice to anyone who attempted to oppose their re-embarkation. The wind was blowing from the southeast, the sea was rising rapidly, and communications with land were becoming difficult. If the admiral had been concerned only with the interests of the navy, he would have put to sea. Fearing some dishonorable surrender on the part of our soldiers, he kept his ships at anchor. The vessels *Leopard* and *Duguay-Trouin* ran aground. Several transports and most of the squadron's longboats and boats were thrown ashore. Those who were on board, sailors and soldiers, were killed or taken prisoner, in full view of the landing force, which did nothing to defend them. The frigates *Aréthuse* and *Vestale*, anchored very close to land, cut their masts. On the 19th, the wind and the sea having died down, the troops were re-embarked. Only the *Duguay-Trouin* could be withdrawn from the coast. After the artillery and equipment of the *Léopard* had been removed, this vessel was set on fire. The expedition's ships returned to France. Admiral Truguet left seven hundred men on the island of Saint-Pierre and on the peninsula of Saint-Antioche, under the protection of two frigates. Such were the results of an expedition that was poorly conceived, poorly prepared and carried out in an unfavorable season. The troops were not numerous enough to overcome the obstacles presented by this enterprise, but they were above all insufficient from the point of view of quality. Of the five thousand men who made up the expeditionary force, about four thousand were southern volunteers who had only previously figured in the political agitations of our large cities.⁵¹

Very bold in fighting defenseless people, they had shown themselves cowardly in the face of the enemy. A letter from Rear-Admiral Truguet, which was read on March 13, 1793, to the Convention, leaves no doubt on this point. The admiral said: "The sailors of the squadron of the Republic, after the conquest of Nice and Villefranche, after having avenged, in Naples, outraged France and raised the tree of liberty among the enemy, when they expected to finally be rewarded for their work and their efforts by the success of the Sardinian expedition, saw themselves cowardly abandoned by disbanded soldiers who shot each other. I gave the Minister of the Navy all the details of this event, and I asked him to call upon the vigilance of the Convention on the soldiers who had thus betrayed the Republic. The conventional government had entertained singular illusions about the success of this expedition. It believed that we would be welcomed by the Sardinians as liberators. The information that had been received in Paris was not serious. Far from showing sympathy for France, the population of the island had risen up to fight us. Everything that concerned this expedition was to have an unfortunate end. We will immediately tell how it ended. In the month of May 1793, a Spanish squadron, strong of twenty-four ships and six frigates, appeared in the Bay of Palmas. This squadron captured one of the two frigates left by Admiral Truguet. The commander of the second frigate, being unable to fight or flee, burned his ship and joined, with his crew, the garrison of Saint-Pierre Island. Shortly after, the latter was forced to capitulate.⁵²

II

On February 1, 1793, the Convention declared war on England and Holland. The court of London had broken off all relations with us, but it did not seem inclined to initiate hostilities. Great Britain was faced with internal difficulties to which we should have abandoned it. It would have been all the wiser to do so, as we were unprepared for this struggle. Unfortunately, the Convention, poorly informed about everything relating to foreign policy, and, moreover, poorly informed by ignorant agents, was convinced that the English people would rise up against its government. Barbaroux, who supported, from the tribune, the draft declaration of war presented by the executive council, affirmed "that the English people would avenge us for a court which pushed to their mutual destruction two peoples who should be united for the happiness of the world." Ducos, also a supporter of war, claimed that England, disillusioned, would fly to the aid of the French. Finally, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lebrun, told the Convention, no doubt to bring it to the government's views, that "if anything could soften the feeling of indignation which the conduct of England had inspired in the executive power, it was the thought that the French nation would maintain its independence at sea with as much success as on land."⁵³

More than words were needed to put our navy in a position to fight against the naval forces of Great Britain, organized by skilled men and maintained for several years, in anticipation of events, on a formidable footing. The Convention showed little competence in matters relating to the military navy. On this point, it placed its trust in a few of its members, among whom Jean-Bon Saint-André should be particularly mentioned. This representative attacked, with extreme violence, the old naval corps and the reforms made by the Constituent Assembly. The objective he had particularly in mind was a new organization of the naval staff. He wanted the officers of the military navy to be recruited from the merchant navy. To obtain educated, brave subjects, worthy of the Republic's trust, said the representative, it was necessary to consult the navigators. It was up to the latter to designate to the government those who were to be part of the new general staff. The election, in the project that Jean-Bon Saint-André submitted to the Convention, was not direct, that is to say that the crews of the warships did not appoint their officers, as had taken place in the battalions of national guards. The sailors, gathered at the chief town of each maritime district, presented candidates to the minister for all the positions. These candidates, if they fulfilled the conditions provided for by law, received the certificates relating to their new situation and were immediately called into service. Representative Jean-Bon Saint-André had no less fixed ideas on sea combats than on the organization of the fleet staff.⁵⁴

He was convinced that the character of naval warfare was about to change. Courage and audacity were becoming the only qualities necessary for our officers. French impetuosity and the enthusiasm that freedom gives were, in his eyes, sure guarantees of victory. It was necessary to repeat the exploits of Jean Bart and Duguay-Trouin, who were not, said the representative at the Convention's tribune, "great geometers, but who had that warmth of soul, that quick eye that is the true talent of the sailor and which alone commands victory." He added: "Disdaining, in a spirit of calculation and reflection, scholarly developments, perhaps our sailors will judge it more appropriate and more useful to attempt these boarding battles in which the French were always victorious and thus astonish Europe with new prodigies of intrepidity." Such were the ideas of a man, and this is why we are making them known, who was to exert a preponderant influence on the direction of naval affairs. Jean-Bon-Saint-André's ignorance was matched only by the assurance with which he spoke of a subject that was foreign to him. We will later see this representative modify his language and himself point out the incapacity of the new fleet headquarters.

What we must note is the singular idea of investing the assemblies of sailors with the right to nominate the candidates from among whom the minister was obliged to choose the officers. In any case, on March 18, 1793, the Convention voted a decree reproducing, except for a few modifications of detail, the project of Jean-Bon-Saint-André. The officers of the military navy, kept in service, the captains and the officers of commerce, in a position to be named ship's ensigns, met at the chief town of the maritime registration district.⁵⁵

There, in the presence of two municipal officers, they proceeded to nominate candidates from whom the minister was to select officers of all ranks, destined to fill the existing vacancies in the naval staff. While the Convention was addressing, with a surprising depth of ignorance, the issues relating to the personnel of the military fleet, new complications arose in Europe. On March 7, Spain, Portugal, Germany, and the Two Sicilies joined the coalition against the Republic.

On January 13, 1793, the Convention had decided that the naval force would be increased to fifty-two vessels. It was easier to give such an order than to have it carried out, given the circumstances in which we found ourselves. For some time now, we had been building up armaments at Toulon, but in the ocean ports, we had only insignificant forces. At the beginning of February, three representatives arrived in Brest. They were charged with giving rapid impetus to the work on the arsenal and to the armaments. The envoys of the Convention were able to convince themselves that the greatest disorder reigned in the port. The workers stood guard and deliberated on public affairs, but they were not working.

The commissioners of the Convention, whether they wanted to demonstrate zeal or had left Paris with very precise instructions, decided that a division, composed of the ships the *Républicain*, *Tourville*, and *Achille*, would put to sea.⁵⁶

Vice-Admiral Grimouard had been called up on January 26, 1793, to command the naval forces assembled in Brest harbor. This admiral, unable to accept this position due to his health, was designated to serve as commander of the navy at Rochefort. Vice-Admiral Morard de Galle replaced him in command of the Brest squadron. The vessels, designated to carry out the sortie ordered by the commissioners, were very poorly equipped in terms of equipment and personnel. Vice-Admiral Morard de Galle and the commander of the navy, Vice-Admiral Thévenard, pointlessly pointed out that, in the state these vessels were in, it was not prudent to send them on a cruise along the coast. Their advice was ignored and the division set sail on March 8. Morard de Galle anchored at Camaret. His ships were missing a large number of men that the *Cocarde* was supposed to bring him. Joined on the 9th by this frigate, Morard de Galle put to sea. On the 17th, the division was on a cape, tack to port, with a very violent westerly wind. On the 18th, at one o'clock in the morning, the wind shifted to the north-northwest. The order was given to take the tacks to the other side. The forward sails on the *Républicain* having been carried away, this vessel made several attempts to execute this maneuver but was unable to succeed. "If I had had," wrote the admiral to the Minister of the Navy, the ex-corsair Dalbarade, "a crew like we used to have, I would have used methods that would have succeeded; but, despite exhortations and threats, I was unable to get thirty sailors on deck. The military gunners, the majority of the detachments of the naval troops, behaved better. They did what they were ordered to do, but the sailors, even the petty officers, did not show up."⁵⁷

The *Républicain* returned the next day to Brest, where the *Achille* and *Tourville* were already located. The *Républicain* was untied [leaking] and sinking. The *Achille* and *Tourville* had lost their topmasts; the *Tourville's* mainmast was cracked. The captain of this vessel had been killed while heading out to maneuver with his officers. His second in command was wounded, and twelve men had perished. In this critical circumstance, the crew of the *Tourville* had refused all service. The division's frigates, which Morard de Galle had sent to cruise offshore, returned a few days later with broken masts or sinking. The crews of these ships had behaved like those of the *Républicain*, *Achille*, and *Tourville*. When bad weather struck, the sailors had gone into hiding. In reality, all discipline had disappeared, and the crews could not be relied upon either to sail or to fight.

In a letter dated March 22, Morard de Galle wrote to Dalbarade: "The spirit of the sailors has been completely lost, and until it changes, one must expect nothing but setbacks in any encounters one may encounter, even when in superior force. This much-vaunted ardor attributed to them consists solely in the words "patriot," "patriotism," which they repeat incessantly, and the acclamations of "Long live the nation! Long live the Republic!" when they have been well flattered. No desire to do well or to comply with their duties." These few simple, clear, precise words, written by an honest man, a good citizen, and a true officer, show what the sailors had become, after so many years spent in disorder and indiscipline.⁵⁸

It seemed essential to take measures to suppress insubordination among crews. If a law were necessary, one should not hesitate to request it from the Convention. The minister, approached in this regard by Vice-Admirals Morard de Galle and Thévenard, consulted his offices. He was given a note worded as follows: "If the minister, given the essential need to restore discipline and subordination, adopts this latter option, a letter will be written to the National Convention to obtain a penal law for the repression of these offenses. However, it is pointed out to the minister that this is a delicate matter to handle at this time, due to the coastal unrest, and that it is necessary to avoid alienating the sailors, even for a moment." The minister wrote at the bottom of this note: "Consult General Latouche." This matter had no further consequences. The order was sent to Brest to repair as quickly as possible the damage caused during the sortie of March 8.

Vice-Admiral Thévenard, who commanded on land, was in no better position than Admiral Morard de Galle. If he advised keeping ships in port that he did not consider fit to leave, suspicions arose about his conduct, and he had to justify himself to the municipality and the various clubs that had arrogated to themselves the right not only to supervise but to direct all services. If the ships, which returned with damage, were not promptly repaired, it was in Paris that the storm was brewing. There, he was accused of not pushing the work on the arsenal with sufficient activity. In both cases, his situation was very critical. We must not forget that the Convention had just established the revolutionary tribunals.⁵⁹

Captain Villaret-Joyeuse, who commanded the seventy-four-strong *Trajan*, was cruising with a few ships off the coast of Morbihan. At the beginning of May, Admiral Morard de Galle received orders to put to sea with all ships fit to sail. The forces detached to the coast of the Ocean were placed under his command. This general officer was about to set sail when an insurrection broke out in his squadron. The maritime authorities called for help from the municipality and the Society of Friends of Equality and Liberty. Finally, a few reliable troops were sent aboard the ships whose crews had revolted. Order having been restored, Admiral Morard de Galle left Brest on May 22 with the seventy-gun ships, *Convention*, which carried his flag, *Neptune*, *Téméraire* and *Tourville*. On the 23rd, he was rallied by the division commanded by Captain Villaret-Joyeuse. Morard de Galle anchored off the island of Groix for twenty-four hours to organize his squadron. He put back to sea the next day with ten ships. The beginnings of the cruise were not happy. Whether this came from the negligence of the new personnel or from their ignorance, numerous collisions occurred. "I have sailed in larger squadrons," wrote Morard de Galle to the minister on June 22, "and in a year I have not seen as many collisions as I have seen in the month since the squadron was assembled." The instructions addressed to the admiral required him to protect the arrival of a convoy leaving Santo Domingo on April 15.⁶⁰

He was also to prevent the landing of English troops in Vendée. These instructions were contradictory. To ensure the convoy's return, the admiral had to head offshore. Furthermore, he could not defend access to our coast if he moved away from land. Morard de Galle wrote to the minister to demonstrate his inability to fulfill the government's intentions and asked him to send him clear and precise orders, which he was unable to obtain. The squadron spent the months of June and July at sea. The admiral intended, in accordance with the minister's instructions, to return to Brest to stock up on supplies when, on August 1, the frigates reported the English. They were to windward and very far away. The admiral ordered the fleet to form the line of battle and the frigates to rise to windward to reconnoiter the enemy. The next day, it was calm until six o'clock in the evening. At sunset, eight ships were seen to the west-southwest of the French squadron. On the 3rd, only one ship was sighted. The *Insurgente*, which rallied the fleet, had heard of eight sails in the northwest. An American ship, visited by this frigate, had encountered, on the coast, an English squadron of fourteen ships and five frigates. On the morning of the 4th, there were no sails on the horizon. The wind, which was from the west, was blowing strongly. The squadron was close to land.

Fearing that he would not round Belle-Isle, Admiral Morard de Galle anchored in the harbor of Palais.⁶¹

On August 6, he wrote to Dalbarade: "I warn you that if I were informed by the discoveries I have made of the position and true strength of the enemy, and if it were recognized that they had only moderate superiority, I would not hesitate, despite the Council's decree, to attack them directly." Our squadron then consisted of seventeen vessels. The admiral had left the Convention and raised his flag on the three-decker ship *Le Terrible*. The ships, which had rejoined the army since his departure from Brest on May 22, still had provisions. The admiral ordered them to be distributed among the vessels. This operation would allow the squadron to extend its cruise by a few days. This was the situation when the admiral received a dispatch in which Dalbarade communicated to him a decree from the Committee of Public Safety, dated August 4, stating that he would hold the sea until further notice. The minister announced the dispatch of a month's worth of provisions that the squadron was to embark under sail or at anchor off the island of Groix. People in Paris had forgotten that most of the ships were in urgent need of repair. The crews included a large number of sick people; they were, moreover, without clothing. The admiral, judging that the return to Brest was necessary, called the generals and captains on board to examine the situation of the fleet with them. The unanimous opinion was that, since any separation would expose the army to being beaten in detail, it was not possible, as the minister prescribed, to send detachments to Groix to stock up on supplies. The season was advancing. The cruise between Belle-Isle and Groix would soon become dangerous. The squadron, receiving a south-westerly gale, would be seriously compromised if it were not in a position to enter Belle-Isle or Quiberon.⁶²

Now, in the gales in this part of the country, it was difficult to see land and therefore to recognize the points along the coast that would allow one to reach these anchorages. The crews were very weakened. The minister said in his dispatch that he would replace the sick; but the promise to replenish the numbers, made several times already, had never been kept. In the vicinity where the French squadron was cruising, if the enemy appeared, any retreat was impossible. In the event of defeat, the army, not being in a position to reach Brest, ran the risk of being destroyed. New information about the enemy had just been received. The frigate *Carmagnole* had sighted twenty-three English vessels off the Penmarch Islands.

There was reason to believe that this squadron's objective was to prevent us from returning to Brest. It was therefore necessary to seize every favorable opportunity to return to this port. The council ended its deliberations by protesting its devotion to public affairs. If the government persisted in its resolution, generals and captains, forgetting the dangers of their position, would know how to die at their posts, if the safety of the country demanded it. Admiral Morard de Galle put to sea on the 11th, after having sent the minutes of the council meeting to the minister. Dalbarade communicated them to the Committee of Public Safety. The latter maintained its decree of August 4. The squadron was to remain under sail until new orders reached it. On the 26th, Morard de Galle anchored at Belle-Isle. Frustrated by bad weather, for the loading of food and supplies, he led his ships into the bay of Quiberon.⁶³

III

After the Sardinian expedition, Admiral Truguet left for Paris, leaving command of the squadron to Rear Admiral Trogoff de Kerlessy. The latter was the valiant officer who had defended the *Glorieux* to the last, on April 12, 1782, at the Battle of the Saintes, and had taken command of it after the death of the brave ship Captain Des Cars. During the various vicissitudes of the Sardinian expedition, he had distinguished himself for his skill and energy. Shortly after Admiral Truguet's departure, Monge summoned him to Paris. Since the municipality of Toulon opposed his departure, the minister was forced to reverse the order he had given. Viewed as suspect, in his capacity as an officer of the old navy, hampered in his actions, as commander-in-chief, by the popular societies, Trogoff found himself in a difficult situation. Indiscipline reigned among the crews. The sailors, accustomed to disorder, sought only to evade the obligations of their position. The new officers obtained no more obedience than the old ones. The frigates *Topaze* and *Arethuse* had been sent on a cruise to the coast of Spain. They were in port at Marseilles, when they received the order to put back to sea. The crew of the *Topaze* refused to obey.⁶⁴

Lieutenant Duchesne-Gohet, who commanded the *Aréthuse*, was the senior of the two captains. He went aboard the *Topaze*, harangued the sailors, and made the most conscientious efforts to overcome their resistance. He was unable to do so. Reporting to Admiral Trogoff this refusal of service, which was all the more serious because we were at war, he said: "All was in vain; I could only get these cries out: 'We will not leave! The frigates are sold! We don't want to rot in prison!' They ended up booing me," the commander continued. "Here are the farandoleurs*, the paraders of liberty caps in the streets of Toulon! There they are, those great criers of Vive la nation! ... Scoundrels who are nothing but its most declared enemies." The man who spoke thus was a former master, who had entered the navy as an officer after 1791. He could not be considered a malcontent. His complaints very well depicted the situation of the crews, intoxicated by noise and declamation, and not fulfilling their duties. The letter from Lieutenant Duchesne-Gohet, compared with the one Admiral Morard de Galle wrote to the minister in March 1793, showed that everywhere the same causes had produced the same effects. Not only had the sailors ceased to obey, but they no longer wanted to fight.

The frigates *Melpomène* and *Minerve*, after having completed a mission in the Mediterranean, were, at the end of April 1793, at anchor, in front of the Lazaret, in the harbor of Toulon. These two vessels were under the command of Captain Basterot, of the *Melpomène*. The order was given to the two frigates to be ready to sail.⁶⁵

*Someone performing a traditional dance. i.e a Morris dancer: I take this to mean fools & clowns with patriot head gear

They were to take two chebecks [Xebec] to Algiers, destined for the Dey. The crews, who were unwilling to leave so quickly, mutinied. The administrative bodies—the authorities who had imposed themselves on the population following the July 1792 riot—boarded these vessels to quell the rebellion. The crews received them very poorly. In the words of the auditor Barthélemy, "the administrative bodies were booed, scorned, and threatened with more than one unfortunate event." The language of the attorney general and syndic of the Var department was even more expressive. "The commissioners," he wrote, "having gone to the Lazaret, the people on board not only persisted in their refusal to leave and deviated from the respect due to the dignity and character of the commissioners by insulting remarks, but they even threatened to hang them and placed ropes to consummate this horrible project." The situation was becoming very serious. The administrative bodies did not admit that their dignity was being undermined, and even less that anyone wanted to hang them. The Toulon authorities were very ill-disposed towards the commander of the *Melpomène*, Captain Basterot, who came from the old navy. Finding the opportunity to reach him, they blamed him for the failure of their efforts. In execution of the order of the three administrative bodies, meeting in session, the attorney general of the Var department requested the auditor commissioner Barthélemy at the naval court martial to prosecute the authors and accomplices of the insurrection which had broken out on the frigates the *Minerve* and the *Melpomène*.⁶⁶

Captain Basterot was accused of treason; it was claimed that, during his last campaign, he had formally disobeyed the minister's orders. He had also committed the error of stopping at Bône without authorization. There, through his counter-revolutionary actions, he had compromised the good relations France maintained with the Dey of Algiers and prevented the Barbary pirates from bringing us wheat. Finally, he had incited the crews of the two frigates to revolt. It was difficult to believe that the first three charges were serious since, without the crews' insurrection, the *Minerve* and the *Melpomène* would have put back to sea under the command of Captain Basterot, charged with a new mission. Thus, only the last accusation remained, and we have seen its merit. A sailor gunner, named Jérôme Laurent, was prosecuted "as an accomplice in the crimes of his commander." Finally, some men from the two frigates were arrested. The juries, convened at the sovereign request of the hearing commissioner Barthélemy, declared that there was reason to indict the accused. Rear-Admiral Trogoff, wishing to clear his responsibility, wrote to the minister: "The judgment was communicated to me, without leaving me a copy. The hearing commissioner took charge of the whole affair, and I only know the accused as he asks me to have them tried." The verdict of the juries having been unfavorable, the courts martial, called to try the ship's captain and the sailor, were convened. They pronounced a capital sentence. Captain Basterot and sailor Jérôme Laurent were shot on May 28th on the seashore, in full view of the entire squadron.⁶⁷

The outline of this affair would not be complete if we did not add the following. It was necessary to assign captains to the *Melpomène* and the *Minerve*. The administrative corps took charge of this task, in which neither Rear Admiral Trogoff, who commanded the squadron, nor Rear Admiral Chaussegros, commander of the weapons, took part. An ensign, not receiving maintenance, a simple harbor lieutenant in Toulon, named Laville, was called to command the *Minerve*. The *Melpomène* fell to the harbor captain, Lieutenant Gay. The appointment of these two officers was presented to the minister by the auditor Barthélemy, not as a benefit granted to them, but as a sacrifice they were making to the country by agreeing to command these vessels. The said Barthélemy ended the letter he wrote to Dalbarade on this subject by saying: "These two officers, who devoted themselves to leading these two frigates with crews that their civic-mindedness immediately procured for them, deserve to enjoy the rank of captain of a ship in the squadrons of the Republic. It is with such choices that a minister can flatter himself that he can make the machine go." The captain of the *Melpomène* lost his command. Things, as far as he was concerned, did not go any further. It must be added that this officer had shown himself in his depositions to be very unfavorable to Captain Basterot. Finally, he did not belong to the old navy. The minister gave his most complete approval to the conduct of the administrative bodies, of the public prosecutor and of the hearing commissioner at the maritime court-martial of Toulon. He hoped that by such means "the much-needed subordination among the crews" would be restored.⁶⁸

Dalbarade also informed Barthélemy that he would not lose sight of Citizens Laville and Gay. "Their services and, above all, their devotion to their country," he added, "will enable them to easily obtain the rank and rewards they deserve."

Captain Prévost-Lacroix, who commanded the *Apollon*, was brought before the court of Digne by Barthélemy. This officer was accused of having sold cannons taken from Saint Lucia to the Swedish island of Saint Barthélemy in 1790. This accusation was absurd. In any case, even had the facts been true, they would have been covered by the amnesty of 1791. The court of Digne acquitted Captain Prévost-Lacroix. Barthélemy, very irritated, had him arrested again and sent him before the revolutionary tribunal of Paris, convinced that this time Captain Prévost-Lacroix would not return to Toulon. Revolted by this unworthy conduct, Trogoff, although he maintained extreme reserve, wrote to the minister to defend the captain of the *Apollon*. He was, said the admiral, an excellent officer, having, in all circumstances, done his duty, and completely innocent of the crime of which he was accused. There is reason to believe that the minister took no steps in favor of this officer. In any case, the revolutionary tribunal did not disappoint the confidence of the hearing commissioner. Captain Prévost-Lacroix was condemned to death. He perished on the revolutionary scaffold on January 5, 1794. The judgment stated that he was convicted of connivance with the royalist party. The accusation brought against him was no longer remembered in Paris. There were a large number of officers belonging to the squadron in the prisons of Toulon. Trogoff, who did not even know the reasons for their arrest, reported this state of affairs to the minister.⁶⁹

No reply was received. "Since my last letter," wrote Admiral Trogoff to Dalbarade on May 29, "Captains Brueys and Simony Cadet have been removed from Fort Lamalgue. The others are still in the same condition." By "the others," this meant the captains and officers of the squadron, imprisoned by the all-powerful will of the auditor Barthélemy, the attorney general, the administrative bodies, the clubs, and the popular societies, for the number of masters was large. In short, the navy and the city were in the hands of people representing the lowest and most vile in Toulon. As for the government, whether it approved or was powerless, it did nothing to change this situation. Admiral Trogoff felt very keenly the humiliating position he was placed in. Embittered and irritated, he asked to resign his duties. "Although I have repeatedly asked you to decide where and how I will serve," Trogoff wrote to Dalbarade, "you have never replied to me. I confess that this affects me infinitely. This uncertainty makes it impossible for me to do everything I would like for the greater good of the Republic. Besides, my position is so thorny that it can no longer exist like this. I therefore ask you to pronounce both for me and for the good of the service." Whatever his desire to leave his post, he showed, in command of the squadron, as much zeal as ability. Although he received no instructions, because Dalbarade, either because he was very negligent in the exercise of his functions or because he did not want to compromise himself, wrote very little, he took all the measures that the circumstances demanded.⁷⁰

Cruisers protected our trade against privateers. The greatest effort was made to repair the ships that had suffered damage during the Sardinian expedition and to equip new vessels. When the English and Spanish appeared in the Mediterranean, Trogoff kept the minister very closely informed of their movements. The Toulon Jacobins, following the example of their Parisian colleagues, discussed all military operations. They openly criticized the admiral's conduct, demanding that he put to sea with all the forces under his command. Carrying out this measure, which only our enemies could have advised us to take, would have led to the destruction of the squadron. Trogoff resisted firmly. By refusing to go in search of the enemy, he was, moreover, only complying with government instructions. In one of the rare letters he had addressed to the commander of the Toulon squadron, Dalbarade said "not to put out at any price, unless one was perfectly sure of being in equal numbers with the enemy, under penalty of unforgivable recklessness." Finally, Dalbarade wrote to the commander of the arms Chaussegros that the Executive Council, meeting at the Committee of Public Safety, had decided that "the Toulon squadron would only put to sea as long as its forces balanced those of the enemy."⁷¹

IV

The revolution carried out by the Paris Commune on May 31, 1793, and the decree of June 2, ordering the arrest of the Girondin deputies, aroused general indignation in France. Seventy-six departments declared themselves against the Convention. The major cities raised troops to march on Paris. At the time these events were taking place, Toulon, as we have seen above, was groaning under the weight of an unbearable tyranny. In this city, given over to continual unrest since 1789, the Jacobins reigned supreme. The municipality had seized all powers. The naval service chiefs were without authority. Their decisions remained unexecuted whenever they did not receive the approval of the clubs. The popular societies had constituted themselves the arbiters of all things. The life and liberty of the citizens were at their mercy. They imprisoned the officers whom they chose to consider suspect, and they appointed, to fill the positions thus made vacant, individuals who had no title to the ranks conferred on them. The men of disorder maintained close relations with the ships of the squadron, in order to keep the crews at the disposal of the revolutionary element. Such was the state of affairs when the news of the insurrection of the departments reached Toulon.⁷²

The population judged the moment favorable to free themselves from the domination of a minority that was imposing the most shameful despotism on the city. On July 13, the Jacobin party was overthrown. The men who had taken charge of affairs were mistaken about the consequences of the movement that followed the events of May 31 and June 2. Believing in the triumph of the departments, they acted vigorously in line with the opinion that had brought them to power. All the measures adopted by the previous administration, under pressure from the clubs, were reversed. Representatives Beauvais and Bayle, who were on mission in the city, were imprisoned. Some men paid with their lives for the crimes they had committed during their too-long dictatorship. The Committee of Public Safety, upon learning of the Marseille uprising, had ordered the Minister of the Navy to take the necessary measures to ensure that convoys and ships heading for that city were taken to Toulon. The maritime authorities in that port were to inform the government of the arrival of the ships, the nature of their cargo and the names of the owners. Dalbarade's instructions reached Toulon after the movement of July 13. It was the general committee of the sections that opened the minister's dispatches. Their contents were immediately communicated to the sections in Marseille. The arrangements made in Paris caused great irritation in the latter city. As for the Toulon committee, it forbade the maritime authorities from carrying out the government's orders. It did more; it sent relief in the form of men and money to Marseille.⁷³

The navy had remained outside the evolution that had taken place on July 13. Just as it had taken no part in the movement, it had done nothing to stop it. The squadron staffs had witnessed, as mere spectators, the revenge taken by the sections on the clubs. In the first reports they sent to Paris to account for the various incidents that had led to the defeat of the Jacobin party, Rear Admiral Trogoff, commander of the squadron, Rear Admiral Chaussegros, commander of the weapons, and Puissant, the civil ordonnateur, did not seem to attach much importance to the changes introduced in the personnel of the municipality. The ordering officer, who was specifically charged with informing Dalbarade of the events that had taken place in the city, wrote on July 18: "For thirteen days we have not received any decree or bulletin from the Convention, and no public papers have reached us. However, everything is calm, and good harmony continues to reign." The ordering officer announced to the minister, without adding any comment, that "six section commissioners had come to congratulate the people of Toulon for having shaken off the tyrannical yoke of the anarchists, to assure them of the full eagerness of the people of Marseille, to offer them their resources and their arms, and to tighten more and more the bonds of the most intimate fraternity." The general committee of the sections had decided that a commissioner, charged with dealing with the exchange of prisoners of war, would be sent to the commander of the English fleet. In bringing this determination to the attention of Dalbarade on July 17, the organizer said: "According to the general wish of the committee of sections of this city, and according to all the principles of humanity, means will be taken to proceed with this exchange."⁷⁴

Finally, the organizer wrote to the minister on July 25: "Your letters from this courier were delivered to me in full, and with a confidence, on the part of the sections, that I will surely deserve. The greatest means I have of serving the Republic is to contribute to peace and unity. I see here only good republicans, as full of zeal for the maintenance of the Republic as for the suppression of schemers and ill-intentioned people. However unfavorable the false patriots, enemies of the fatherland, may give to the opening of the sections, be assured, citizen minister, that the arsenal of Toulon and the department of Var were never better disposed to fight the enemy, if he appeared." Was the ordainer deluding himself, or was he acting in bad faith? It is difficult to say. What appears most clearly in the ordainer's correspondence is, on the part of this official, the clearly stated intention not to compromise himself with any party and especially with the one that dominated in Toulon. Time only made the position of the heads of the naval service more difficult. The latter had the duty to inform the government of what was happening in Toulon; on the other hand, the general committee of the sections demanded that their correspondence be submitted for its examination. Finally, where was the government? Was it that of the seventy-three departments which had taken up arms on learning of the coup d'état carried out by the Convention, or was it still in this Assembly, violator of the law, that sovereignty resided? In Toulon, where no news reached what was happening in the capital or in the provinces, it was not easy to know.⁷⁵

On July 29, the Convention ordered the release of citizens imprisoned following the events of July 13. This Assembly decided, the same day, that the Minister of the Navy would immediately submit his report on the appointment of the officers commanding the ships of the Toulon squadron. The Committee of Public Safety ordered Dalbarade to summon Rear-Admirals Chaussegros, Trogoff, Saint-Julien, and Ordonnateur Puissant to Paris. The commander of arms was to be replaced by Rear-Admiral Castellan, Trogoff by Bouvet, and Puissant by Chief of Administration Chevillard. On August 8, this decision was reversed. The Committee of Public Safety probably assumed that the heads of department, thus summoned, would not obey, and, on the other hand, it feared that this appeal, by arousing their distrust, would push them to extreme measures. The Toulon insurrection continued to march, with great boldness, along the path it had chosen. Far from looking back, it acted as if, in the struggle that had begun, it had retained no doubt about the triumph of the Girondins. On the 12th of August, the general committee of the sections sent to the provisional executive council and to citizen Dalbarade an address in which the grievances of the population against the government were set out without any restraint. This address, which foreshadowed the most serious events, ended thus: "Remember that we have to maintain and pay a large garrison, a naval army, the entire mass of sailors and workers in the arsenal and that all the time you lose in ensuring that the funds necessary for these important matters are safely delivered to us adds to the rigorous responsibility that weighs on you."⁷⁶

Finally, consider that two formidable squadrons from England and Spain encompass the entire extent of our coasts, and that, in their calculations, perhaps, they flatter themselves that they will obtain from our distress and our needs what treason would have delivered to them. This, Citizen Minister, is what the inhabitants of Toulon felt they should explain to you. The safety of the Republic and your own safety are at stake. Reflect on the conduct you must adopt and do not expose yourself, by delaying too long in speaking out and, above all, in coming to our aid, to the just reproach of having shared the perfidy of our slanderers and to the danger of having willfully sacrificed one of the most important places of the Republic." Among the names affixed to the bottom of this document were those of Trogoff, Chaussegros, and Puissant. The president of the general committee of the sections was a naval construction assistant, called Enouf. The sending of this address fixed the situation; the break with the Convention was complete. A large number of officers, among whom the ship captains de Grasse, Simony the elder, de Goy, Brueys, Bellon, Burghes de Missiessy, Venel, Saint-Vallier, Desloges, sent their resignations to the minister. While the Girondins traveled through the departments spreading vain words, their adversaries took prompt and energetic measures. After the defeat of Wimpfen at Vernon and Pacy-sur-Eure, considerable forces were directed against Lyon and Marseille. The successes of the Convention reminded the people of Toulon of the true state of affairs. Having gone into full revolt against the government, they had to expect, if they were beaten, bloody reprisals.⁷⁷

It was then that the General Committee of the Sections, drawn down a fatal slope, glimpsed the possibility of entering into negotiations with the English.

Until July 13, Admiral Trogoff had served the Republic with as much loyalty as independence. After that date, he continued to correspond with the Commissioner General of the Navy, discussing the needs of his squadron and saying little about what was happening in Toulon. One might have thought that he considered the events in that city as an internal revolution to which he should remain aloof. "You are undoubtedly aware, Citizen Minister," Trogoff wrote to Dalbarade on July 18, 1793, "that the sections are open in Toulon. They rely on our civic-mindedness and our talents to take the measures that we believe to be most useful in the present circumstances." After July 13, the committee having demanded that Trogoff's correspondence be placed before its eyes, it lost all significance. In the middle of August, the committee gave Trogoff a dispatch in which Dalbarade blamed him for having raised his flag from the *Tonnant* to the *Commerce-de-Bordeaux*. One feels some surprise to see the minister, in the midst of these serious events, preoccupied himself with a question of such minor importance. Perhaps one should see in this letter only the serenity of the offices continuing, in the midst of the storms, what they believe to be an infringement of the regulations. Dalbarade had, without a doubt, which, moreover, must often have happened to him, signed this dispatch without reading it. The discontent of Paris was not only inopportune, it was illegitimate. The admiral, as resulted from his reply, had the right to fly his flag on any ship of his squadron that he judged appropriate.⁷⁸

Trogoff renewed, more insistently than in the past, the request he had already made several times, to relinquish his command. "Your letter," he said to Dalbarade, "reminds me of all I have suffered, all I still suffer and will suffer in a position that does not belong to me and which should be filled by a man (this being Truguet) who should make it a point of honor to be at his post." The admiral watched with deep bitterness as the decisive moment approached, and he would have liked to avoid the serious difficulties he foresaw. This letter is dated August 18; it was the last one Trogoff addressed to the minister.

V

The naval forces that Great Britain maintained in the Mediterranean were placed under the command of Lord Hood. This admiral, upon learning of the events unfolding in the south of France, approached our shores. The Spanish, under the command of Don Juan de Langara, followed the English. A few Neapolitan and Sardinian vessels joined the latter. Two delegates from the general committee of the Marseille sections appeared on August 23 aboard the three-decker *Victory*, on which the flag of the commander-in-chief of the British squadron was flying.⁷⁹

They had been tasked with negotiating, with Lord Hood, a treaty of alliance whose main goal was the restoration of the monarchy. These envoys seemed surprised not to encounter, on the English ship, commissioners appointed by the general committee of Toulon. Admiral Hood declared himself ready to intervene in the manner indicated to him, but he refused to occupy Marseille. Toulon seemed to him the most suitable point to conduct his fleet. However, he demanded that our squadron be disarmed and that the arsenal and military works be handed over to him. He added that the port, ships, and forts would be returned to France immediately after the conclusion of peace. The English demanded that Toulon take the white flag. If the agreement was established, the admiral undertook to cooperate, by all means in his power, in the fight against the Convention. Finally, he would lift the blockade which closed the entrance to Marseilles and Toulon to neutral vessels. Receiving no communication from the latter city, Lord Hood decided, the next day, the 24th, to send an officer there. Lieutenant Cooke, of the *Victory*, entered the harbor during the night. The weather was dark and he was able to reach the quays of the city without being recognized. This officer was admitted, on the morning of the 25th, before the general committee. The proposals he carried were accepted. The English promised to immediately land troops to defend Toulon. The danger was pressing. The city was threatened to the east by one of the detachments of the Army of Italy, and to the west by the soldiers of General Carteaux. As the English officer left the meeting room, some people tried to stop him, but the crowd took his side, and he returned to his boat without being disturbed.⁸⁰

Lieutenant Cooke returned to Toulon on the 26th, and left again in the evening of the same day, accompanied by Captain Imbert de Lebret, who commanded the *Apollon*. The latter was responsible for delivering the treaty ratified by the general committee to the commander of the British squadron. Everything that had been done up to that point was the work of the sections. But, at that moment, any concealment became impossible. Not only was it necessary to inform the officers and crews of the events unfolding, but it was also necessary to persuade them to make way for Admiral Hood's army. Trogoff had disappeared from the scene. He had not been seen for several days. Had Trogoff reached an agreement with the leaders of the movement, or was he succumbing under the weight of such a difficult situation? In any case, he took no action and issued no orders indicating a clear desire not to confuse the cause of the ships he commanded with that of the city. It is therefore legitimate to conclude that he approved the line of conduct adopted by the general committee of the sections.

Upon hearing the news of the imminent arrival of the English, great agitation reigned throughout all our ships. Delegates, appointed by the crews, met to consider the difficulties of the situation. In the absence of Trogoff, who was said to be ill, Rear Admiral Saint-Julien exercised command of the squadron. He visited each ship, harangued the sailors, and announced that he would oppose the entry of the British fleet by force. By his order, preparations were made to present the crossing to the enemy, if the latter attempted to force the pass.⁸¹

On July 13, 1793, the population of Toulon had no other objective than the overthrow of the Montagnard party. But the goal pursued, at that time, by the majority of the inhabitants, had been quickly surpassed. The members of the general committee, certain of the fate that awaited them if they fell into the hands of the Convention members, spared no effort to avoid this extremity. They declared that they would treat the squadron as an enemy if it attempted to evade their authority. The forts, in which cannonballs were ostentatiously heated, were manned by reliable men. Moreover, numerous emissaries visited the ships, urging the crews to make common cause with the inhabitants. On the ships, armed in Toulon, the sailors were, for the most part, from Provence. Living for several years in disorder and indiscipline, they were incapable of any serious effort. Some, seduced by the promise of receiving their pay in cash and being sent home, yielded to the solicitations of the Toulon residents. Others, declaring that they did not want to shoot their brothers, nor be shamefully delivered to the enemy, deserted. Soon it was easy to see that the resistance party would rely only on a small number of sailors belonging, for the most part, to ships recently arrived from Brest. The crews were what they had been made. For several years, they had been pushed to revolt, with the sole aim of driving out the old officers. The sailors knew only one thing: to rebel. Duty and honor had become empty words for them. On the 27th, the *Perle*, anchored under the walls of the arsenal, raised the command flag of Rear Admiral Trogoff.⁸²

The signals, ordering the squadron to take up station in the small harbor, rose to the masts of this corvette. There were seventeen vessels in the harbor. After a moment's hesitation, the *Généreux* set sail; shortly after, the *Scipion* followed. At nightfall, only the *Commerce-de-Bordeaux* and the *Tonnant* remained alongside the *Commerce-de-Bordeaux*, flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Saint-Julien. These three vessels had been abandoned by most of their crews, and the last two by their captains. During the night of August 27-28, Fort Lamalgue was occupied by English troops under the command of Captain Elphinstone. This officer sent a member of parliament to Rear-Admiral Saint-Julien to inform him that he had received orders from Lord Hood to fire on any vessels that refused either to surrender in the small harbor or to unload their gunpowder. Judging further resistance impossible, Saint-Julien abandoned his ship and headed for the countryside. Captains, including *Cosmao*, *Duguay-Trouin*, *Duchesne Gohet*, *Arethuse*, *Gassion*, and *Topaze*, officers of all ranks, sailors, and workers, accompanied him in his escape. That same day, the British squadron entered the harbor. Don Juan de Langara, kept informed of events by Lord Hood, came to anchor near the English.

Rear-Admiral Saint-Julien had shown himself to be far below the role he had assumed. By taking the place of Rear-Admiral Trogoff, he had contracted, towards himself and towards the squadron, the obligation to prevent, by all means in his power, the enemy from penetrating the harbor.⁸³

To succeed in this undertaking, he had to, immediately after being warned of the impending arrival of the English, land troops and occupy the forts overlooking his ships. By doing so, he would have given direction to all those, officers and sailors, who wanted to resist the general committee, and he would have rallied the undecided, always numerous in such circumstances. Instead of demonstrating this resolve, he gave the committee's emissaries time to influence the crews. While he wasted precious time in vain demonstrations, the means of action at his disposal were taken away by his adversaries. Does this mean that he would have been happier if he had displayed more skill and energy? In other words, would he have succeeded in leading men who were, for the most part, inaccessible to the feeling of honor? It is difficult to say. We can only affirm with certainty that the admiral had some chance of carrying out his enterprise successfully only by displaying, from the beginning of the crisis, extreme vigor. Rear-Admiral Saint-Julien hid for several days in the woods of the Seyne. Fearing to be captured by the Toulon patrols which were scouring the countryside, he returned to the city at night and gave himself up as a prisoner in the hands of the Spanish. If this general officer had joined Carteaux's army, he would have been well received. In the session of September 7, 1793, the National Convention decided that honorable mention would be made in its minutes of the conduct of Admiral Saint-Julien as well as of the sailors and workers of the port of Toulon who had gathered under the flags of the Republic.⁸⁴

On the same day, it issued a decree by which Trogoff, commander of the Toulon squadron, Chaussegros, commander of the arms, and Puissant, naval officer of the same port, were declared traitors to the country and outlawed. All good citizens were ordered to attack them. Their property was forfeited to the nation.

On September 7, the day the Convention outlawed the naval service chiefs, the general committee of sections endeavored to rally to its cause the naval forces charged with protecting our trade on the coasts of Provence. Trogoff wrote to Citizen Lalonde, who commanded the Villefranche station, to go to Toulon with the ships under his command. Trogoff's letter showed the distinctly monarchical turn that the Toulon insurrection had taken. It was worded as follows: "I take advantage, sir, of the opportunity of an English parliamentarian to inform you that the city of Toulon has adopted the constitution of 1789 and has recognized as its legitimate king Louis XVII, son of Louis XVI; that there are currently, in Toulon, two naval armies from England and Spain, which, with a rather prodigious quantity of troops, protect Toulon and its surroundings, which makes the departure of French ships unnecessary. I therefore think, sir, that all those who are of the same principles and who are currently in Villefranche or in the surrounding area, must go to Toulon. It is according to these principles that you will be good enough to give orders to the ships which are with you to go here. A refusal on their part would prove to us that they are not of the same principles as us. The English parliamentarian must be charged with giving safe conducts to the various vessels which will come here." This attempt failed completely.⁸⁵

None of the ships detached to the coast arrived in Toulon.

The conduct of the Toulon squadron's headquarters engaged the responsibility of the Committee of Public Safety. Who had appointed the admirals, captains, and officers? If the current government had not appointed them, why had it kept them? These were the questions being asked in Paris. The Committee of Public Safety, which did not intend to be attributed the slightest wrong, first had the Assembly issue a decree ordering the arrest of Citizen Taillevis-Périgny, Monge's former deputy at the Ministry of the Navy. Jean-Bon-Saint-André was tasked with showing that the choices complained of were the work of the Constituent Assembly. In his report on the treason of Toulon, read on September 9 from the tribune of the Convention, he said: "Citizens, called to regenerate France, you had everything to do for its happiness and for its glory. The army and the navy were still infected with the vices of the old regime. Your sea and land forces were in vicious hands: it was proposed to substitute dangerous leaders with, if not genius, at least courage and virtue. The so-called reforms of the Constituent Assembly were null and void, illusory; all choices were left to the minister. Périgny, Monge's deputy, populated your navy with counter-revolutionaries, and that is how Trogoff came to command the Toulon squadron."

In studying the events of this period, one is always surprised, however accustomed one may be, by these unproven assertions, delivered in a solemn tone by speakers who are themselves convinced that they are not telling the truth. If we assumed them to be in good faith, what should we think of their ignorance?⁸⁶

Should we assume their ignorance? After Jean-Bon-Saint-André's speech, one would be tempted to believe that the Toulon squadron's general staff was composed solely of officers who had belonged to the court and were well-known for their royalist sentiments. This was not the state of affairs. A few words will suffice to demonstrate this. Rear-Admirals Trogoff and Saint-Julien came from the naval guards. Moreover, they both belonged to the class enjoying privileges under the ancien régime. Admiral Saint-Julien's conduct excuses us from saying that this choice could not be repudiated by the Convention. As for Trogoff, we must not lose sight of the fact that the municipality of Brest had taken him under its protection. It was on the recommendation of this elective body that he had been called to command the *Duguay-Trouin*, taken from the ship's captain de Lajaille following a riot which had broken out in Brest. Trogoff had therefore given pledges to the new order of things. As for Rear-Admiral Chaussegros, a former port officer, it was to the revolution that he owed his rank and the position of commander of the weapons which he occupied in Toulon. Let us move on to the captains of the squadron. The ship which first obeyed the signal from the *Perle*, thus giving an example of submission to the wishes of the general committee of the sections, was the *Généreux*. Captain Cazotte, who commanded it, after having started in the navy in the lower ranks, had become a harbormaster in 1770, a harbor ensign in 1775, and a harbor lieutenant in 1780. It was the regime of 93 that had made him a ship captain. Were the other ships in the squadron commanded by officers of the old navy, suspected by their birth of a particular attachment to the monarchy?⁸⁷

Captains Imbert de Lebre, de Goy de Bègue, and Duhamel du Désert, former marine guards, who commanded the *Apollon*, the *Scipion*, and the *Thémistocle*, could be classified in this category. The *Commerce-de-Bordeaux* had no captain at this time. As a result, there remained Captains Causse of the *Centaure*, Eyraud of the *Destin*, Boubennec of the *Entreprenant*, Héraud of the *Héros*, Gavoty of the *Heureux*, Pourquoi of the *Tricolore*, Puren Keraudren of the *Orion*, Bouvet of the *Patriote*, Poulain of the *Pompée*, Racord of the *Suffisant*, Pasquier of the *Commerce-de-Marseille* and Amiell of the *Tonnant*. All these captains had been masters, pilots, port officers or second lieutenants of ships. We see how little Jean-Bon-Saint-André had the right to say that Monge's deputy, Périgny, had populated the navy with counter-revolutionaries. It would even have been fair to recognize that the latter had taken a very active part in the disorganization of the navy. It is true that, in the path followed by the Convention, however revolutionary one had been the day before, one was exposed to being a moderate the next day. In any case, when Jean-Bon-Saint-André had spoken, in the name of the all-powerful Committee of Public Safety, the Assembly, whether or not it was satisfied with the explanations that were willing to be given, did not push things further. There was no question of the indignity of the Toulon authorities, nor of the coup d'état carried out in Paris by the Jacobins, circumstances which had played a large part in the conduct of the officers of Trogoff's squadron. One could, moreover, only begin such a discussion by accusing the Committee of Public Safety and the majority of the Assembly, something which no one would have thought of.⁸⁸

It therefore remained accepted that the Constituent Assembly were the real culprits.

VI

General Carteaux seized Avignon and reestablished the authority of the Convention in the department of Vaucluse. After driving the Marseillais beyond the Durance, he took possession of Aix. On August 25, the Convention army entered Marseille; a few days later, it laid siege to Toulon. In this city, the crews of the disarmed ships were causing serious concern among the Allies. The Breton sailors were particularly noted for their hostile attitude. Lord Hood, fearing that they would join the Republican troops, decided, in agreement with the general committee of the sections, to send them back to the ports of the Ocean. Four vessels, chosen from among those least suited to war, the *Orion*, *Patriote*, *Apollon* and *Entreprenant*, were designated for this service. Only the guns necessary for making signals were left on these vessels. The commanders and staff were taken from among those whose presence seemed a danger to the allies. On September 13, the four vessels and a barge, the *Pluvier*, set sail, taking five to six thousand sailors. This division was placed under the orders of Captain Bouvet.⁸⁹

After the capture of Lyon, the Republicans received reinforcements that allowed them to press their operations with greater vigor. By the beginning of November, the Allies were reduced to the strictest defensive posture. There were approximately twenty thousand men in Toulon, including, in addition to a few French, English, Spanish, Sardinians, and Neapolitans. The English, concerned with ensuring the retreat of their squadron in the event of failure, had firmly established themselves on the heights overlooking Fort de l'Aiguillette. They had dug ditches and erected entrenchments defended by large-caliber guns. As a result of the accumulation of works, this position, which bore the official name of Fort Mulgrave, was called Little Gibraltar. General Dugommier commanded the Republican army. The future Emperor of the French, artillery captain Bonaparte, was able to convince the commander-in-chief that the key to the position was on the heights of Aiguillette. The attack on Fort Mulgrave was resolved. On the night of December 17, three columns left our camp. Favored by dark and rainy weather, they approached the enemy works without the alarm having been given. The soldiers scaled the parapets, overturning all the obstacles they encountered in front of them. After a bloody fight, the English were pushed back to Balaguier. At the same time, General Lapoype seized the heights of Faron. The allied line was cut at the two most important points. Already the French cannonballs were arriving in the harbor, and the enemy ships were forced to change anchorage. Admiral Hood immediately convened a council of war in which the evacuation of the city and the destruction of the warships and the arsenal were decided.⁹⁰

The destruction of the warships and the arsenal was decided upon. The next day, the Allies withdrew their outposts and concentrated in the city and at Fort Lamalgue.

Captain Sydney-Smith had requested and obtained the mission to bring ruin and devastation to our port. On the afternoon of the 18th, the gates of the arsenal were guarded by a detachment of English and Spanish troops, charged with preventing entry to the workers and residents of the city. The convicts appeared, and it seemed that they were motivated by hostile sentiments. They disappeared after the English had positioned a few gunboats in front of the penal colony. From the surrounding heights, Republican batteries fired on the city. The projectiles falling into the arsenal drove away those who might have been tempted to intervene and hinder Sydney-Smith in the accomplishment of his work. Around ten o'clock in the evening, the fire started. The English then left the military dock and went to the basin located in front of the town. But the workers, the inhabitants, and some naval gunners met them with such intense musketry fire that they retreated. Sydney-Smith headed towards the ships *Héros* and *Thémistocle*, aboard which Toulon residents involved in the previous incidents had been imprisoned. After the personnel had been removed, these two vessels were set on fire.

As soon as the first glimmers of fire appeared, the English began embarking the troops. It was then that one of the darkest episodes of this period, so rich in tragic events, took place.⁹¹

The sight of the flames rising above the harbor, the fire from the Republican batteries, and the successive explosion of two buildings on which the gunpowder for the French squadron's ships had been placed, struck terror into the souls of the people of Toulon. The truth, hidden until then, appeared to them in all its horror. They had been abandoned by their allies. Distraught, fearing the vengeance of the Convention members, the inhabitants left their homes, taking with them their most precious possessions. Arriving at the docks, they rushed into all the boats they could lay their hands on, striving to join the Allied squadrons, which were, at that moment, completing their preparations for departure. Others left the town and wandered through the countryside, seeking some unknown retreat. In the confusion of such a flight, members of the same family found themselves separated. Finally, the projectiles launched by the Republican batteries caused many victims in this crowd, circulating through the streets of the town or crossing the harbor. From Ollioules, where they had established their headquarters, the representatives Robespierre, Fréron, Barras, Ricord and Salicetti witnessed these scenes of desolation. That same night, they wrote to the Committee of Public Safety: "The infamous town offers, at this moment, the most dreadful spectacle; the ferocious enemies of liberty set fire to the squadron before fleeing; the arsenal is ablaze; the city is almost deserted: one only encounters convicts who broke their chains in the upheaval of Louis XVII. The troops of the Republic are currently occupying all the posts: two explosions which have occurred have made us fear some ambush."⁹²

We are postponing the army's entry until the powder magazines have been inspected. During the day, we will consider the measures to be taken to avenge liberty and the brave Republicans who died for their country. The enemy squadron is still not without anxiety; the winds are against it; it may be forced to return within range of our batteries. The place was bombarded from noon yesterday until ten o'clock, which precipitated the flight of the enemy and the criminal inhabitants. Two hundred Spanish horses were found, saddled and bridled, but could not be embarked. The embarkation took place in disorder. Two longboats loaded with fugitives were sunk by our batteries. If the weather prolongs the squadron's crossing, it is impossible that it will not experience the greatest scourges, all the ships being filled with women and children, and the enemy having at least five thousand sick."

When day broke, the Allied fleets were under sail and out of cannon range. General Dugommier's army, put on guard by the explosions heard since the day before, fearing to find the ground mined beneath its feet, did not immediately move. It did not enter Toulon until daybreak on the 20th. It is reported that the commander of the Republican army, seeing, on the night of December 18, the harbor of Toulon covered with boats carrying inhabitants aboard enemy ships, cried out: "The guilty leave and the unfortunate remain." These words betrayed the thoughts of the brave general. He would have liked indulgence to be shown to those who had had enough confidence in the victors to wait for them.⁹³

The Salicettis, the Ricords, the Frérons, the Robespierres, and the Barrases were not men who understood such sentiments. Only junior officers, non-commissioned officers, soldiers, sailors, workers, and a small number of residents remained in the city. The latter were among those who had taken the least active part in the events. The important figures in the insurrection had left on the English fleet. The representatives took no notice of this situation. They had pledged to make a terrible example of Toulon, and their sole concern was to satisfy the Committee of Public Safety on this point. On December 20, that is to say the very day the troops entered the city, they wrote to Paris: "National vengeance is being unleashed, people are being shot by force: all the naval officers have already been exterminated; the Republic will be avenged in a manner worthy of it, the spirits of the patriots will be appeased. As some soldiers, in their drunkenness, went to pillage, we had it proclaimed throughout the city that the booty of all the rebels was the property of the triumphant army; but that all the furniture and effects had to be deposited in a large place that we indicated to be appraised and sold immediately for the benefit of our brave defenders, and we promised in addition a million to the army. This proclamation produced the happiest effect." Seventeen days after the entry of the troops, eight hundred Toulon residents had been shot. These summary executions were followed by courts-martials which claimed new victims. These died on the scaffold. Some inhabitants had been killed or wounded during the siege; others had managed to escape from the city. Finally, nearly fifteen thousand people, men, women and children, had found refuge on the English ships and on the French vessels which had left with Admiral Hood.⁹⁴

The population, which before the events had not exceeded thirty thousand souls, was thus considerably reduced. However, more than a thousand people died by shooting or the guillotine. This number included women and young girls. The Convention approved all the measures taken by the representatives of the people before and after the entry of the troops into Toulon. On December 24, 1793, it issued a decree worded as follows: "The infamous name of Toulon is abolished. This commune will henceforth bear the name Port-de-la-Montagne. The houses within this commune will be razed; only the establishments necessary for the service of war, the navy, and the subsistence and supplies of the Republic will be preserved." "The news of the capture of Toulon and the decree of December 24 were carried to the armies and departments by special couriers.

It will be recalled that the fire started by Sydney-Smith on the night of December 18 had awakened national sentiment among a large number of people, residents, soldiers, and sailors. The same men who had prevented the English from entering the merchant port had rushed into the arsenal, which had been abandoned at that moment by the English and Spanish troops. Aided by the convicts, they had managed, if not to stop, at least to limit the ravages of the fire. This intervention had saved the ships *Sans-Culottes*, with one hundred and twenty cannons, *Ça-ira*, *Tonnant* and *Languedoc*, with eighty cannons, *Guerrier*, *Heureux*, *Commerce-de-Bordeaux*, *Peuple-Souverain*, *Conquérant*, *Censeur*, *Mercur*, *Alcide* and *Généreux*, with seventy-four cannons, and the principal establishments of the arsenal.⁹⁵

The *Triomphant*, eighty, *Suffisant*, *Dictateur*, *Centaure*, *Tricolore*, *Destin*, *Héros*, *Duguay-Trouin*, and *Thémistocle*, all seventy-four, had fallen prey to the flames. To these losses, others had to be added. The *Commerce-de-Marseille*, of one hundred and twenty guns, on which was flown the flag of Admiral Trogoff, Captain Pasquier, the ships, of seventy-four, the *Pompée*, Captain Cazotte, and *Puissant*, Captain Féraud, the frigates *Aréthuse* and *Perle*, of forty, *Topaze*, of thirty-six, the corvette *Poulette*, of twenty-eight, and the brig *Tarleton*, of fourteen, had left the harbor of Toulon with the English fleet. These vessels formed a separate squadron, placed under the command of Admiral Trogoff. The *Scipion*, Captain de Goy, had left Toulon to fulfill a mission in Italy, before the entry of the Republican troops. On November 28, on the harbor of Livorno, fire broke out on board this vessel. The help sent to him by the English and Neapolitan ships, near which he was, could not avert the danger. The *Scipion* sank with eighty-six men. Captain de Goy, who had not wanted to leave his ship before the evacuation was completely completed, perished in this catastrophe. Captain de Goy, former aide-de-camp to Suffren, was an officer of very great value. Rear-Admiral Chaussegros, commander of the arms, and several officers, among whom were Captains de Grasse, captain of the *Topaze*, Duhamel du Désert, Eyraud, Racord, Imbert de Lebre, Amielh, former commanders of the *Thémistocle*, *Destin*, *Suffisant*, *Apollon* and *Tonnant*, had left Toulon on Admiral Trogoff's ships.⁹⁶

The French squadron sailed to Porto-Ferrayo, then departed for England in two divisions. The first arrived in March 1794, and the second in November of the same year. These ships were decommissioned after inventories had been drawn up, detailing the equipment on board. Captains Amielh, Eyraud, and Duhamel du Désert returned to France, the first in 1795, the second in 1802, and the third in 1803. Captain Imbert de Lebreton went to the continent in 1807 and later to France. The other captains remained in England until the Restoration.

Rear Admirals Trogoff and Chaussegros died at the beginning of 1794. The third chief of the naval service, Ordonnateur Puissant de Molimont, who was no longer in Toulon at the time of the capture of the city by the conventional troops, returned to France in 1796. Arrested and imprisoned, he declared that, when the English entered Toulon, he had been subjected to the most severe treatment by them. Taken on board Lord Hood's ship, he had been sent to Gibraltar and from there to England. Considered a prisoner of war, he had been duly exchanged before being sent back to France. This story presented some obscurity. How could the government have been ignorant for so long of the true situation of the former commandant of Toulon? On the other hand, what sort of opposition had he made to the English to explain their conduct towards him.⁹⁷

In any case, brought before a court martial as an émigré, he was acquitted. Held in prison for some time longer, he was released and placed on retirement.

The occupation of Toulon by the English was one of the most painful episodes of the civil war brought about by the events of May 31 and June 2, 1793. The antagonism existing within the Convention between the Montagnards and the Girondins was not based on any national interest. It was the struggle of two parties vying for preeminence. The Montagne, composed of men more adept at revolution than their adversaries, called on the Paris Commune for help. The triumphant riot drove the Girondins from the Convention. The departments responded to this provocation by rising up against the capital. We see the share of responsibility falling on Robespierre, Danton and Saint-Just in the events we report. As for the people of Toulon, they committed a crime against France by allowing foreigners to intervene in our internal affairs. This treason had a close link with previous events that it is worth recalling. In December 1789, that is to say four years earlier, the squadron leader of Albert de Rions, who was then commander of the navy, had been seized by the crowd, mistreated and taken to prison. This squadron leader had nothing to reproach himself for. He was a distinguished man, very brave, having brilliantly served his country during the American War of Independence. No one was more worthy than he of the position he occupied. His employment, far from constituting a privilege, was one of those which are necessary in all times and under all regimes. It was therefore against a military leader, exercising a regular, constitutional power, that people had rebelled.⁹⁸

The National Guard had let it happen, no doubt finding the spectacle of this squadron leader's humiliation pleasant. It had, by its attitude, authorized the violence inflicted on a large number of naval officers. But, as was easy to predict, the National Guard lost its popularity the day it no longer had any concessions to make. Having become suspect in its turn, it was persecuted by the very people it had protected. To escape the shameful despotism under which it was bent, it revolted. Guardian of one of our largest naval arsenals, it delivered it to France's most formidable enemy. The National Guard of Toulon, that of 1789, composed of the elite of the population, atoned for its faults in 1793, in one of the most terrible catastrophes that a city had ever suffered.⁹⁹

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BOOK III

Insurrection of the squadron commanded by Admiral Morard de Galle. - Return of this squadron to Brest. - Measures taken upon its arrival. - Representatives Jean-Bon-Saint-André and Prieur are sent on a mission to Brest with the broadest powers. - Arrival in the ports of Brest, Lorient, and Rochefort of the ships departing from Toulon on September 13, 1793. - Treatment inflicted on the staffs and crews of these vessels. - Representatives Lequinio and Laignelot in Rochefort. - Measures taken to restore discipline on board vessels arriving from Quiberon Bay. - Admirals, captains, and officers dismissed, imprisoned, or sent before revolutionary tribunals. - Appointments made to fill vacancies in the staffs. - Rear Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse is called to command the Brest squadron. - France is threatened with famine. - Violence perpetrated by the English against neutral trade.

I

The Finistère administration had learned, during the month of May 1793, from the department's deputies that agitators were threatening the Convention. Moved by a very strong feeling of indignation, it had raised troops intended to march on Paris and protect the Assembly. Brest had particularly distinguished itself in this movement of opinion. Representatives on mission to the city had seen their existence threatened, and they had been happy to be allowed to leave. Two agents of the Minister of War had been imprisoned. Ostensibly charged with inspecting army stores, they were carrying out a political propaganda mission favorable to Montagne.¹⁰⁰

The party, which had made the events of May 31 and June 2, after triumphing over its enemies on the battlefields, resolved to punish those who had shown hostile feelings towards it. Finistère, although it had hastened, upon hearing the news of the events at Pacy-sur-Eure, to recall the Brest Federates, was not forgotten. The Convention ordered the release of the agents who had been imprisoned and decreed the accusation of the department's administrators. Finally, it appointed a new administration whose headquarters were moved to Landerneau. At the beginning of August, the mayor of Brest and the principal municipal figures were summoned to the bar of the Convention. On August 25, Barère, speaking on behalf of the Committee of Public Safety, painted a lamentable picture from the podium of what was happening in Brest, "where Pitt's infamous policy," he said, "was making attempts. Certain reports," he added, "inform us that there are plans to set fire to the port of Brest. The enemies of the Republic have led the people of the department of Finistère astray. The administrations are corrupt, the weakness of the military leaders has increased the evil. It is a matter, citizens, of purging the Brest workshops of the bad characters who are causing indiscipline."

None of this was true, and Barère knew it better than anyone. If the city of Brest did not like the Mountain, it had, on the other hand, a horror of foreigners. But the deliberate lies of the speaker of the Committee of Public Safety were intended to persuade the Assembly that energetic measures were necessary. Barère requested the sending to Brest of representatives Bréard and Tréhouart "knowledgeable in the navy and having firmness."¹⁰¹

The assembly hastened to approve this measure. The two members of the Convention arrived in Brest on September 11. To raise up the partisans of the Montagne, to lower their adversaries, such was, in a few words, the mission they had to fulfill. All those in the city of Brest who had been at the head of the movement since the beginning of the Revolution became suspect in their turn. The part of the population, contained until then, which had triumphed, following the coup d'état of May 31 and June 2, wanted to enjoy its victory. The leaders surrounded Bréard and Tréhouart to warn them (which they considered, they said, a sacred duty), "of the schemes hatched by the rich, hoarders, merchants, most of whom had been promoted, through intrigue, to authorities that they compromised." In other words, the victors were demanding the positions of the vanquished. This was obviously the most serious side of the policy of the Brest Montagnards. They earnestly demanded the punishment of the traitors. This was how they called the adversaries they were particularly keen to get rid of. The latter, considered, until then, as good republicans, were, after the days of May 31 and June 2, "no more than a horde of aristocrats, wanting to plunge France back into the most shameful slavery." Bréard and Tréhouart made numerous arrests, and they gave their friends the satisfaction that they were waiting for with great impatience. All things seemed to be going well when alarming news from the squadron commanded by Morard de Galle reached Brest. This admiral, as we have seen above, had anchored in the bay of Quiberon to take on water and take on supplies.¹⁰²

He intended to return to sea as soon as these two operations were completed. His squadron comprised, at that time, twenty-two vessels. On September 4, he received orders to cruise, with the entire fleet, on the passage of a Dutch convoy which was to set sail around the 15th, under the protection of a weak escort. The destination of this merchant fleet was Spain, Portugal, and the Mediterranean. Most of our vessels had suffered damage. Consequently, the admiral informed the minister that he would send Rear Admiral Landais to search for the convoy with the *Côte-d'Or*, *Achille*, *Northumberland*, *Jean-Bart*, *Tigre*, and four frigates. The admiral had illusions about his authority. He was to get nothing more from his crews.

The naval administration, disorganized, as were all public services at that time, left our ships in the greatest destitution. Most of the men were without clothes. Although there were a large number of scorbutics, the crews were on a diet of salted meat. The instructions of the Committee of Public Safety forbade all communication with the land. Sailors who, for four years, had been living in a state of permanent revolt, could not accept these sacrifices. On the night of September 13, the admiral received an address from the Convention concerning the Toulon insurrection. This document was read the next day on board each ship to the assembled crew. Knowledge of the events that had occurred in Toulon, by giving a purpose to the sailors' complaints, led to an explosion that was only waiting for an opportunity to occur. The same day, a deputation from the *Auguste*, headed by the aspirants Baron and Crevel, appeared on board the *Terrible*.¹⁰³

With great insolence of language, he demanded the Fleet's return to Brest. A deputation from *Suffren* followed, making the same demands. The orators from these two ships, covering their conduct with the mask of patriotism, said that in asking to go to Brest, their only goal was to defend this city against the enemies of the Revolution. They claimed that, if they were sent to sea, it was with the intention of handing them over to the English. Morard de Galle made futile efforts to quell the sedition. However, firmly rejecting the request addressed to him, he sent back the deputations from the *Auguste* and the *Suffren*, declaring to them that he would not go to Brest before receiving the order from the government. His decision on this point, he added, was irrevocable. In one of the numerous documents emanating from Morard de Galle and relating to this affair, we read: "In the afternoon, a deputation from the ship the *Auguste* came on board the *Terrible*, which seemed very animated and whose speaker, Midshipman Crevel, told me, in a very arrogant tone, that they wanted to go to Brest to defend this city; that Toulon having been delivered by treason, they did not want the same to happen to Brest; that the people who held them at Quiberon were betraying them. He made several similar remarks in a tone that made me come out of character. I called them cowards, traitors, counter-revolutionaries and because they told me that they would sail, I replied (I believed it at that moment) that there were twenty faithful ships that would fire on them, if they dared to make a movement that I had not ordered, and that I would treat them as cowards and traitors."¹⁰⁴

Three vessels, the *Téméraire*, *Indomptable*, and *Bretagne*, having shown favorable dispositions, the admiral believed that the movement would not spread. This hope was promptly dashed. At daybreak on the 15th, the topsails were hoisted aboard the *Convention*, *Superbe*, *Tourville*, *Achille*, *Auguste*, *Northumberland*, and *Révolution*. On board the *Northumberland*, part of the rigging was cut. The admiral went aboard each of these vessels with Rear-Admirals Kerguelen and Landais. He was unable to bring the crews to compliance. Exhortations, threats, appeals to patriotic sentiments, all failed. The morale of the squadron will be judged by the following. "Captain Thomas of the *Northumberland*," the admiral wrote to the minister, "told me that his crew was in revolution and not in insurrection; that he had asked him to hoist the topsails and that he had replied that if that pleased them, he was willing too." The admiral saw himself obliged, in order to maintain an apparent subordination, to promise that the question of the return to Brest would be examined in a council comprising a member of the general staff and a delegate from the crew of each ship. This council took place the same day, in the presence of the general officers and captains of the army. The admiral made a new attempt to bring the crews back to duty. His efforts were in vain. The sailors believed that with the Revolution they had won the right to impose their will. The council decided that deputies would go to the representatives of the Convention in the department of Morbihan to present the crews' demands. The helmsman Conord and the marine infantryman Verneuil were designated to carry out this mission.¹⁰⁵

It was further agreed that the squadron would not go to Brest until the Convention had given the order. This motion did not meet with universal approval. The delegates of several ships imperiously urged the admiral to set sail for that port without waiting for instructions from the government.

The admiral did not hide from himself that the calming was more apparent than real. He was convinced that unrest would flare up again if the wind were to blow from a direction that would allow a voyage to Brest. Consequently, when informing the minister of the events that had just transpired, he warned him that he would take advantage of the first favorable opportunity to set sail. The admiral added that, moreover, it was not prudent to hold the sea with vessels having damaged masts and very weakened crews. On the other hand, he informed Dalbarade that he would not be able to carry out the government's orders relating to the pursuit of the Dutch convoy. He was convinced that the crews of the vessels designated for this service would cry treason and refuse to obey. On the 16th, despite all the protests made the day before, the crew of the *Indomptable* hoisted the foretopsail and made preparations for sailing. On board the *Suffren*, they wanted to cut the cables. On September 20, the wind having become favorable, the squadron set sail.

The members of the Convention Bréard and Tréhouart were in Brest, as we saw above, when they learned that an insurrection had broken out in Quiberon Bay. One of them, the representative Tréhouart, went to Lorient where he embarked on the frigate *Nymphe* to join the squadron.¹⁰⁶

Having met it on September 20, he ordered it to go to Belle-Île, where it arrived the next day. Despite the admiral's urgent letters about the difficulties of its position, the naval department seemed to attach no importance to the serious news coming from Quiberon Bay. The very day the squadron anchored at Belle-Île, the admiral received orders to establish the army's cruise fifteen or twenty leagues off the coast of Ushant. He communicated this dispatch to the representative Tréhouart. After consulting the general officers and captains gathered in council, this member of the Convention ordered the admiral to return to Brest. The situation was as follows: five ships, *Jean-Bart*, *Téméraire*, *Trajan*, *Neptune* and *Impétueux*, obeyed the orders of their commanders; four, *Tigre*, *Audacieux*, *Aquilon* and *Juste*, gave serious grounds for complaint; twelve, *Suffren*, *Auguste*, *Tourville*, *Northumberland*, *Convention*, *Révolution*, *Achille*, *Superbe*, *Côte-d'Or*, *Indomptable*, *Terrible* and *Bretagne*, were in full revolt. The squadron anchored on September 26, 1793, between Saint-Mathieu and Bertheaume. The delegate of the Convention, passing on a packet, went to Brest where the squadron entered the next day. The admiral, on the orders of the representatives, forbade the ships to communicate either with each other or with the land. This ban was lifted on October 1 for the entire squadron with the exception of the ships *Auguste*, *Côte-d'Or*, *Northumberland* and *Tourville*. Captains Duplessis de Grénédan, *Côte-d'Or*, Coëtnempren, *Jean-Bart*, Thomas, *Northumberland*, the officers, masters and sailors were disembarked and imprisoned.¹⁰⁷

Upon learning that Representative Tréhouart had deemed it necessary, following the events in Quiberon Bay, to return the squadron to Brest, the Committee of Public Safety showed great irritation. Since 1789, the revolts of the naval personnel had been considered, in Paris, where a blind eye was systematically turned, as a legitimate demand for the rights of the people. To overcome the obstacles that separated them from power, the Jacobins, favored by the weakness of their adversaries, had destroyed discipline. When they seized the government, they wanted to restore it. But disorder has not reigned with impunity for several years in a military corps. The evil leaves traces that the most energetic will cannot make disappear in a day. The representatives Jean-Bon-Saint-André and Prieur (de la Marne) were sent to Brest. They were to take, in concert with their colleagues Bréard and Tréhouart, all the measures that the circumstances made necessary. The two new delegates of the Convention had just arrived at their post when, on October 13, the *Patriote* and the *Entreprenant* entered Brest. We have already said that these two vessels, as well as the *Apollon*, the *Orion* and the transport the *Pluvier*, had left Toulon on September 16, with five or six thousand sailors. It was to be believed that the officers and crews of these vessels would be well received. This was not the case. The representatives forbade the *Patriote* and the *Entreprenant* any communication with the land. Armed boats came to line up with the two vessels to ensure the execution of this measure.¹⁰⁸

The next day, the commanders, staff, passenger officers, and there were a large number of them on each of the ships that left Toulon, masters, and sailors were taken to prison. The commander of the *Orion*, all the officers, as well as masters and sailors of this ship, suffered the same fate. The *Orion* had entered Lorient where the representative Prieur was, who probably did not want to be less severe than his colleagues in Brest. After a summary investigation, carried out by Lieutenant Lucadou, appointed to the provisional command of the *Patriote*, the representatives Tréhouart and Jean-Bon-Saint-André sent Lieutenant Fichet, Ensign de l'Ecluse, second master gunners Michel Jacquelin and Gardinet, gunner Gille Blanchard and naval gunner Vauson to Paris to be brought before the revolutionary tribunal. We will tell you immediately what happened to these unfortunates. All appeared before the revolutionary tribunal. When the English entered Toulon, the lieutenant and the ensign were part of the general staff of the *Commerce-de-Marseille*; one of the second masters and the gunner were embarked on the *Orient*. The other second master and the naval gunner belonged to the crew of the flute, the *Mulet*. It is easy to imagine the astonishment of the accused, and especially of the two second masters, the gunner and the naval gunner, when they were asked how they had not opposed by force the horrible treason which had delivered Toulon to the English.¹⁰⁹

It should be noted that one of the petty officers and the naval gunner were embarked on a flute, that is, on a vessel that had no cannons. How, after all, could sailors, petty officers, and even lower-ranking officers be held responsible for such serious events? One might have thought that the tribunal was dealing with not a few subordinates, but Trogoff, Chaussegros, and Puissant, that is, the men who, during the Toulon uprising, commanded either on land or in the harbor. No particular grievance was brought against the accused. The questions put to them by the president of the tribunal could have been addressed to all the officers, masters, and sailors who had arrived on the *Apollo*, *Orion*, *Patriote*, and *Entreprenant*, and all would have been guilty, since not a single ship had opened fire against the English. The six accused had been sent before the revolutionary tribunal, not because they were guilty, but to satisfy the passions of the moment. They were sentenced to death and executed.

It seemed that the vigilance of the representatives on mission in Brest had delivered France from some grave peril. In a report on this affair, Jean-Bon-Saint-André wrote to the Committee of Public Safety: "The most severe precautions were taken to prevent the effects of the contagion. The officers who had been so wicked as to surrender the Toulon fleet, or at least so cowardly as not to defend it, were placed under arrest while the national courts decided their fate. Some, whose crime was notorious, were sent to the revolutionary tribunal. They paid with their heads for the outrage they had committed against liberty. The fate of the officers of the *Apollon* was the most disastrous."¹¹⁰

This ship had entered Rochefort. The town and port were under the control of two representatives named Lequinio and Laignelot. The *Apollon*, commanded by Lieutenant Brelay, had a complement of fourteen hundred and twenty men, including thirty-two officers or chief petty officers. The captain, the general staff, and most of the officers were sent to prison. The crew remained aboard the *Apollon*, but had no communication with the land. Lequinio, Laignelot, and their friends were treated with extreme coldness by the majority of the department's inhabitants. By following the ordinary forms of justice, the representatives could do nothing against the moderates. With a revolutionary tribunal, they could easily reach them. Lequinio and Laignelot therefore harbored a secret desire to establish this tribunal, but no pretext had yet presented itself to allow them to follow through with this project. The arrival of the *Apollo* was the opportunity they had been impatiently awaiting. They ordered the formation, within twenty-four hours, of a revolutionary tribunal "to judge all citizens of this department accused of offenses against the liberty of the people, the security of the government of the Republic, the unity and indivisibility of the Republic, of any theft committed against the Republic and tending to bring about its decline through squandering, in a word, of all crimes against the national interest." With this text, there was no one who could now believe themselves safe. The tribunal was composed of three judges, a public prosecutor, a substitute and twelve jurors. The public prosecutor was Victor Hugues. Lequinio and Laignelot brought the staff of the *Apollo* before the tribunal which they had just created and of which they had, as they themselves said, in a letter addressed to the Committee of Public Safety, named all the members.¹¹¹

The latter proved themselves worthy of the representatives' trust. Ten officers, Lieutenants Jean Brelay, Louis Guérit, and Joseph Crassous, Ensigns Etienne, Varenne, Jacques Compet, and Michel Mage, infantry captains Henri Marizy and Antoine Daurt, and naval surgeon Claude Bordeau, perished on the scaffold. Two officers were sentenced to deportation and eight to six months of detention. This was the treatment of people whom Admiral Hood had dismissed because their presence seemed dangerous to the safety of his troops. To provide a basis for the accusation against the officers arriving from Toulon, it was claimed that they had come to the northern ports with the secret intention of handing them over to the enemy. One would be tempted to believe that these were officers of the old navy, deeply devoted to the royal cause, and daring, at the risk of their lives, to come to Rochefort to attempt a raid on this town and hand it over to the English. Nothing of the sort existed. The officers embarked on the *Apollon* were all former masters, pilots or auxiliary officers. They had reached the ranks they occupied as a result of the disorganization of the naval staff in 1790, 1791 and 1792. On the other hand, the officers who left Toulon to go to the ports of the Ocean belonged to different vessels of Trogoff's squadron. There was no agreement between them, and if, as was said, they were pursuing a goal in coming to Rochefort, Lorient and Brest, from whom could they hold their mission?¹¹²

However, representatives Lequinio and Laignelot did not hesitate to say that, under the pretext of bringing the district's sailors to these ports, these vessels "were tasked with spreading the spirit of insurrection, federalism, fanaticism, and royalism, in a word, with acting, by all means, to deceive the people, take control of the main arsenals, and prepare the inhabitants for the reception of the English vessels." This document was no less odious than it was mendacious. We are therefore forced to conclude that the representatives committed an abominable crime for the sole purpose of winning the votes of the Committee of Public Safety and the revolutionary societies.

If you want to know what the Lequinios and the Laignelots were worth, read the following. "We have formed a revolutionary tribunal like that of Paris," wrote the representatives to the Committee of Public Safety, "and we ourselves have appointed all the members, except the one who must close the procedure, the guillotine. We wanted to leave to the patriots of Rochefort the glory of freely showing themselves as the avengers of the Republic, betrayed by scoundrels; we simply exposed this need to popular society; I," cried citizen Ance with noble enthusiasm, "it is I who aspire to the honor of bringing down the heads of the assassins of my country." Hardly had he had time to pronounce this sentence than others rose up for the same purpose, and they demanded, at least, the favor of helping him. We proclaimed the patriot Ance guillotine and invited him to come and dine with us, take his powers in writing and sprinkle them with a libation in honor of the Republic. We believe that in a few days the judges will put him to death.¹¹³

We believe that in a few days the judges will enable him to provide practical proof of the patriotism with which he has just shown himself so above the prejudices that it was always in the interest of kings and tyrants to maintain, in order to fuel all the social inequalities on which their power was based.

II

The representatives Bréard, Tréhouart, and Prieur (de la Marne) had given way to the personality of Jean-Bon-Saint-André. The latter, upon arriving in Brest, had assumed command of the port and harbor. The Committee of Public Safety was counting particularly on the energy of this representative to ensure the restoration of order in the squadron. At the end of October, Jean-Bon-Saint-André announced the resolutions he had taken to punish the acts of indiscipline committed in Quiberon Bay. The result of the representative's meditations will be found rather unexpected. Admiral Morard de Galle lost his command. This general officer, who had been made captain of a ship after the battle of Praya on April 16, 1781, on the proposal of the bailiff of Suffren, was not only a meritorious officer but an honest man and a true patriot. He had no other fault than to command at a time when these perilous functions, while they placed an unlimited responsibility on the head of the person in charge, did not give him any of the rights necessary to fulfill them. Jean-Bon-Saint-André wrote to the Convention that Vice-Admiral Morard de Galle "had his birth and the distrust of the army against him."¹¹⁴

In the representative's opinion, this admiral could not be suspected of treason, but he had not shown sufficient energy in commanding his squadron. He should have acted on his own initiative instead of convening a council. All this was easy to say. But how would Morard de Galle have brought back to duty crews who, for four years, had no longer obeyed anyone? Had Representative Bréard been more successful than the admiral? When he passed through the middle of the fleet on the *Nymphe*, he was greeted with cries of "To Brest, Brest!" from the crews. After examining the situation in council, for he too had called a council, he had done what the mutineers had asked. Finally, Morard de Galle was accused of being subject to the influence of his flag captain. This was not serious. Morard de Galle was ordered to go to Paris to report his conduct to the Committee of Public Safety. The terrible Committee dismissed him, but allowed him to retire to Auxonne with his family. Rear-admirals Le Large and Kerguelen, and ship captains Boissauveur and Thomas were stripped of their ranks. They were ordered to reside twenty leagues from the coast and the borders. Rear-admiral Le Large, an officer of the old navy, wrote Jean-Bon-Saint-André, was of dubious civic-mindedness. The same could be said, he added, of Rear-Admiral Kerguelen, a nobleman of the old navy, imbued with prejudices incompatible with the principles of the Republic and, for these reasons, ill-suited to serve it.¹¹⁵

Rear-Admiral Le Large was not, and the representative could not be unaware of this, an officer of the old navy in the sense then attached to the word. He had, it is true, been appointed harbor captain in 1780. But it was thanks to the successive reorganizations carried out since 1789 that he had entered the corps of navigating officers and been appointed rear admiral. It was therefore to the Revolution that he owed the position he held. Rear Admiral Kerguelen had belonged to the old navy, in which he had initially served with distinction. Having left in 1772 on a voyage of discovery to the southern lands, he had given rise, during this campaign, to the most serious reasons for discontent. Brought before a court martial in Brest on his return in 1775, he was stripped of his rank and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. He returned to the navy in 1793 as a ship captain and was shortly afterwards made rear admiral. He had shown himself, in all circumstances, devoted to the new order of things. We see that the accusation brought by the representative against these two rear admirals had no serious basis. Ship captain Boissauveur, commanding the *Superbe*, had the impudence, according to Jean-Bon-Saint-André, to give a ball in Quiberon, the day after the day on which the treason of Toulon had been learned. Let us say immediately that this assertion was contrary to the truth. On September 13, during the squadron's stay in Quiberon Bay, Captain Boissauveur spent the evening at the port captain's house. During the night, the admiral received news of the Toulon uprising, news which was not made known to the squadron until the following day. Thus, Captain Boissauveur had not given a ball; he had been a simple spectator at a very modest evening which had taken place at the port captain's house.¹¹⁶

At the time, he was completely unaware, and neither were the people he was with, that Toulon had revolted. As for Captain Thomas of the *Northumberland*, the representative "felt that his language, although patriotic, was not sincere." This was the captain who, in Quiberon Bay, told Morard de Galle that his crew was not in an uprising but in a revolution. "I thought then and I still think," wrote Captain Thomas to Jean-Bon-Saint-André to explain his conduct, "that any partial insurrection is a crime, because every insurgent man ignores the salutary restraint of the laws, while the revolutionary man shows his concern about the dangers of his country, by reconciling his energy with his duties, without leaving the sphere assigned to him by his respect for the laws." This was not very clear. In any case, this comment, given to his reply to Morard de Galle, did not modify the feelings of the representative. Captain Thomas was far from being an enemy of the new order of things, but the language he had used, excellent perhaps a few years before, had had its day. The Montagnard party was in power and wanted to stay there. Consequently, it no longer admitted insurrection. The ship captains Bonnefoux, Daugier and Richery were imprisoned. Daugier, army major on the *Terrible*, and Bonnefoux, flag captain of Admiral Morard de Galle, were "suspected, on a denunciation from Rear-Admiral Landais, of having, by signals agreed between them and the enemy, communicated with them."¹¹⁷

Rear Admiral Landais was acting in bad faith, or his ignorance, toward the signal service was beyond all measure. In any case, the accusation was inept. This is the only expression one can use to characterize it, and it would not have required great perspicacity for Jean-Bon-Saint-André to realize this. When the time came to speak, Captains Bonnefoux and Daugier requested that their conduct be examined by a court martial. An investigation took place. The depositions collected within the squadron, which included that of Villaret, were very harsh on Admiral Landais.

What followed was more serious. The ship captains Duplessis de Grénédan, of the *Jean-Bart*, Coëtnempren of the *Côte-d'Or*, the ship lieutenants Lebourg and Enouf, the ensign Leduc, the deputy chief of administration Verneuil were sent to Paris to be brought before the revolutionary tribunal "as accused of having conspired against the unity and indivisibility of the Republic and the safety of the French people, by exciting, encouraging and supporting the seditious and counter-revolutionary movements which took place on several ships of the republic, in Brest, to deliver the port to the enemies of the Republic". Brought before real judges, these officers would have easily exonerated themselves from an accusation which was based on nothing. Their sending to Paris, ordered by Jean-Bon-Saint-André and Tréhouart, was equivalent to a death warrant. Naval Captains Coëtnempren, Duplessis de Grénédan, Naval Lieutenant Lebourg, and Deputy Chief of Administration Verneuil appeared before the Revolutionary Tribunal on January 16, 1794. They defended themselves vigorously, but nothing could prevail against the tribunal's bias.¹¹⁸

Captains Coëtnempren and Duplessis de Grénédan and Deputy Chief Verneuil were sent to the scaffold. One is left stunned upon reading the grounds of the judgment. "It is established," the judges dared to say, "that there existed intelligence with the external enemies of the Republic, aimed at protecting a Dutch convoy, composed of more than one hundred sailboats, destined for the ports of Spain and Portugal, and facilitating the entry of the enemies into French territory by handing over to them the vessels, stores, and arsenals belonging to France." Coffinhal presided. The judges were Charles Bravel, Gabriel Toussaint, Sallier, and Pierre-Noël Subleyras. One of the accused, Lieutenant Lebourg, was a rare find; at the time, he was acquitted. It is likely that this officer had influential friends. In any case, his subsequent conduct showed that he did not belong to the vanquished party. When the revolutionary tribunal of Brest was established, Lebourg had himself assigned to the prosecution of Public Prosecutor Donzé Verteuil. Of the six officers sent to Paris by the representatives, only four had appeared before the revolutionary tribunal. Lieutenant Enouf had died in prison, and Ensign Leduc, having fallen ill, could not be brought to trial.

After taking the measures we have just outlined, Bréard and Jean-Bon-Saint-André, satisfied with their work, sent a proclamation to the squadron. After having enumerated at length the reforms which they had just carried out, they said: "A remedy was needed for so many evils; punishments were needed against the guilty. We have examined with all the impartiality of justice what we should do in this circumstance."¹¹⁹

All the newspapers, all the correspondence were placed before our eyes; we read everything, discussed everything, and we only struck when it was clear to us that we had to." After reading this document, one might be tempted to believe that the severity of the Convention members only affected the guilty. It seems that this is due to the representatives on reconnaissance missions for the vigilance and firmness they demonstrated. How, moreover, can one suppose that, during the course of a war with England, such a large number of naval officers were sacrificed without the most absolute necessity? Such, however, was the truth, and, no matter how carefully one examines this matter, it is impossible to arrive at any other conclusion. There had been no conspiracy or counter-revolutionary movements in Quiberon Bay. The crews, tired of the cruise, wanted to return to Brest where they expected to find rest and a more pleasant life. Accustomed for several years to imposing their will, they had rebelled as soon as anyone tried to resist them. It was denying the obvious to claim the opposite. How then can we describe the conduct of the representatives who had dismissed or imprisoned most of the admirals and captains, and who had finally sent officers who were beyond reproach to the revolutionary tribunal in Paris, that is to say, to their deaths? If the admirals and captains had not succeeded in quelling the sedition, it was because there was, on their side, a history of weakness which cannot be overcome in a day. The representatives were obviously imbued with this truth. If they took so many officers from the squadron, it was not because of the Quiberon revolt. Other motives directed them.¹²⁰

They favored, to the detriment of France's true interests, the feelings of envy of those who, masking themselves as patriots, demanded the expulsion of the people whose positions they coveted. It was to achieve this result that people spoke of the dubious civic-mindedness of some and the counter-revolutionary actions of others. Officers, newly joined the navy, stirred up distrust among the general staff and crews against the admirals and captains with the sole aim of replacing them. This party, toward which Jean-Bon-Saint-André leaned, won the day. The officers who were supported by the representatives or the clubs resisted, whether they were from the old or the new navy, whether or not they had pledged their support to the Revolution. The others had to give way to their friends of the moment.

After what we have just reported, one might have thought that the crews' revolt in Quiberon Bay would no longer be a topic of discussion. This was not the case. Some time later, the representatives established a revolutionary tribunal in Brest. The public prosecutor, a certain Donzé Verteuil, also wanted to prove that there had been a conspiracy against the security of the state in the squadron commanded by Morard de Galle. By virtue of a decree of the Committee of Public Safety, issued at his request, Morard de Galle was brought back to Brest. They were willing to grant this admiral, who was ill, permission to occupy a lodging in the town, but a sentry was placed at his door and a gendarme in his room. Donzé Verteuil had the rear-admirals and ship captains who had been dismissed arrested and sent twenty leagues from the coast.¹²¹

An investigation, including a large number of defendants, was immediately begun. It is difficult to imagine anything more revolting than the spectacle of this brave admiral and these officers subjected to such appalling tyranny. If the Ninth of Thermidor had not occurred, they would probably all have perished on the scaffold.

Since 1789, disorder had reached such proportions in the Brest squadron that, several times already, admirals, captains, and officers had found themselves in the urgent need to resign from their positions. This state of affairs, to which the Constituent and Legislative Assembly had bowed, was unwilling to be accepted by the Convention. Having the authority, it used it. The Committee of Public Safety and its agents used their own means, violence, injustice and arbitrariness, but they imposed their will. In a proclamation addressed to the squadron, Jean-Bon-Saint-André and Bréard warned the crews that any new attempt at revolt would be punished with extreme severity. This proclamation outlined the line of conduct that the officers were to follow with regard to their superiors and their inferiors. If all things could have been arranged with words, the Brest squadron would have left nothing to be desired. But it is not enough to indicate to officers the obligations incumbent on them; they must be prepared to fulfill them by their habits and their military education. Unfortunately, these conditions did not exist. The two representatives issued a decree on November 20, 1794, containing provisions that should only have appeared in a law. This decree included a series of articles which together formed a sort of Penal Code for the Navy.¹²²

General officers, commanders, officers, and petty officers of the Republic's vessels, detachment commanders, gunners' and soldiers' officers, and all those who held any rank or position in the naval forces learned that, henceforth, it was their strict duty to maintain discipline among their subordinates. As for the sailors, soldiers, gunners, and others composing the crews, they were instructed to punctually obey the orders of their superiors. This language, however natural one supposes it to be, was new. Disobedience, refusal of service, petitions, collective actions, insults and violence against superiors, revolt—all things with which people had been familiar for several years—were punished with the most severe penalties and, in most cases, by death. The Convention decided on January 5, 1794, that this decree would be enforced in all ports of the Republic.

Since the beginning of the Revolution, municipal authorities had intervened in matters that should have belonged exclusively to the executive branch. In maritime cities, they had gained such influence that they modified the instructions given by the minister to captains and admirals. Ships preparing to set sail were detained in port; others, which the government had wanted to keep at its disposal, were sent to sea. Finally, no operation, whether relating to personnel or equipment, took place on the harbors or in the arsenals without the action of the municipalities being manifest. The Convention abruptly changed this situation.¹²³

It decided that departmental and district administrators, or any other civil authorities of the maritime cities of the Republic, could not, under any circumstances and under any pretext, "detain vessels at rest in their ports or which had received orders to leave. Administrators who presumed to give orders to stop, suspend, or accelerate the departure of vessels, or to change their destination, and those who instigated or signed acts tending to interfere in the management of the naval forces of the Republic, would be brought before the Revolutionary Tribunal and punished by death." Municipalities in Finistère had requested the civil ordinator not to impose any embargo on privateers or merchant vessels. These decrees, which were contrary to a law of June 22, 1793, were overturned. The generals and other agents of the executive branch, it was stated in another decree, "may not be authorized by any particular order to refuse to execute the decrees of the Committee of Public Safety." The representatives themselves, sent on mission, were required to strictly comply with the instructions from Paris.

Rear Admiral Landais asked to resign from his command; this was quickly granted. "Rear Admiral Landais," wrote Jean-Bon-Saint-André, "a patriot, but elderly, defiant, excessively suspicious, jealous, and antipathetic to both officers and crews, could not be retained in his command, and the national interest demanded that the resignation he offered be accepted." The noble officers were dismissed. Among those who fell victim to this measure were ship captains Bruix and Terrasson.¹²⁴

The squadron found itself, from a command point of view, completely disorganized. There was no longer a single admiral in the squadron, and most of the ships were without captains. There were also numerous gaps in the staff. New appointments had to be made. Captains Martin, Cornic, Van-Stabel, and Villaret-Joyeuse were promoted to the rank of rear admiral. Martin and Cornic were former second lieutenants. When the naval corps was organized in accordance with the law of May 10, 1791, they had both been appointed lieutenants. Van-Stabel, on the same date, had been made an ensign. Villaret-Joyeuse had long belonged to the navy. Employed in India as a fireship captain during the American War of Independence, he had gained, by his conduct, the esteem of the bailiff of Suffren. At the end of the campaign, he had received the Cross of Saint-Louis and the rank of lieutenant. His appointment to the rank of captain dated from 1791. It was to him that Jean-Bon-Saint-André entrusted the command of the army. Villaret had arranged for himself, among the officers who had entered the navy after 1789, intelligences which had not been useless to him. Their votes, more than the personal feelings of the representative, had brought him to the first place. Shortly after their arrival in Brest, Bréard and Jean-Bon-Saint-André received a letter worded as follows: "Citizen representatives, the times are pressing; we need a leader to command the army and a leader who, above all, is deeply imbued with a sincere love for the Republic. We are being worked on from all sides and our most cruel enemies surround us."¹²⁵

Hasten, citizen representatives, to appoint him, hasten, we implore you, in the name of the homeland that is as dear to you as it is to us; hasten to give this city the dose of emetic that your colleague Dumon gave to that of Boulogne to purge it of this venom that constantly attacks the healthy parts of the Republic. Rise up, worthy sans-culotte representatives, we are, and soon we will know how to disperse the traitors and villains of every kind who are among us. The firmness and talents of Citizen Joyeuse make him worthy of your choice: we will never fear a firm man, that is what is needed to command an army. We are true sans-culottes and among those republicans who want it to be one and indivisible." Among the signatories of this letter were naval lieutenants Pillet, Lefrancq, and Lucadou. These officers were not forgotten in the distribution of favors. Jean-Bon-Saint-André made them naval captains and called them to command the *Entreprenant*, the *Patriote*, and the *Jean-Bart*. Naval lieutenants who had been serving as officers in the navy, some for several years, others for several months, became naval captains. The naval lieutenants and ensigns were appointed, for the most part, by the popular societies. These latter, moreover, played a very large part in the personnel movement we have just indicated.

The appointments, made to organize the staff of the Brest squadron, were presented as the result of work as difficult as it was conscientious.¹²⁶

"We needed," wrote Jean-Bon-Saint-André to the Committee of Public Safety, "courageous men who possessed both the talent and the audacity without which there is no success at sea; we surrounded ourselves with all the pure, incorruptible, and enlightened patriots known to us. We asked them for observations, information, and facts that could establish our confidence; we took steps to keep away the nobles, the supporters of the old navy, and the schemers." Subsequent events will show us whether Jean-Bon-Saint-André had been successful in the choices he had made, and whether it was by consulting pure, incorruptible, and enlightened patriots that he had appointed not only the admirals, but also the captains and officers of the Brest squadron.

Famine had joined all the calamities that France was then beset by. Because of the continental war, we could not bring in the supplies we needed through our borders. Moreover, the sea route was closed to us. The English, resuming their familiar habits of violence, stopped ships, regardless of their flag, carrying supplies into our ports. The Convention, wishing to take reprisals, issued a decree on 9 May 1793 by virtue of which French warships and privateers were authorized to bring into the ports of the Republic neutral ships loaded, in whole or in part, either with foodstuffs belonging to neutrals and destined for enemy ports, or with goods belonging to enemies. Goods belonging to enemies were declared safe capture and confiscated for the benefit of the captors.¹²⁷

Foodstuffs belonging to neutrals and loaded for enemy ports were paid for based on their value in the place for which they were intended. The French government undertook to release neutral vessels as soon as the arrested foodstuffs or seized goods were unloaded. Freight was paid at the rate stipulated by the shippers. Finally, we granted compensation, the amount of which was to be determined according to the length of their detention, to neutral vessels brought into our ports. This law was applicable to all prizes taken since the declaration of war. However, it was stated that it would cease to have effect on the day when the enemy powers declared free and unseizable, even if intended for the ports of the Republic, the foodstuffs that were neutral property and the merchandise belonging to the French government or citizens that were loaded on neutral ships. The decree of May 9 was to create difficulties for us with the United States. Indeed, our relations with this power were regulated, from the point of view of international maritime law, by the commercial treaty of February 6, 1778. However, by virtue of the provisions of Article XXIII of this treaty, we did not even have the right to seize enemy merchandise loaded on American ships, with the exception of war contraband. The treaty government, understanding the need to maintain the good relations existing between the French Republic and the United States, decided that the provisions contained in the decree of May 9 would not be applied to American vessels.¹²⁸

England eagerly seized the opportunity given to it to legitimize its conduct. A royal order, based on the decree issued by the Convention, instructed the British navy to arrest and send to England vessels laden, in whole or in part, with wheat or flour destined for a port in France or for a port occupied by our armies. After the sale of said wheat or flour on behalf of the English government and the payment of a suitable freight, the neutral vessels were to be released. The British authorities reserved the right to allow the captains of the arrested vessels to proceed to a port in a nation friendly to Great Britain to sell their cargo. We were within our rights in demanding that neutrals ensure that the English respect their flag, if they wanted us to respect it ourselves. But in such matters it is not enough to be right; one must be able to defend one's cause by force if circumstances make the use of force necessary. Such was not our situation, and it would have been more prudent to do nothing that might displease the nations with whom we were at peace. The London cabinet did not dare to openly maintain the measures it had taken in retaliation for the decree of May 9. The royal order of July 15 was revoked shortly after its promulgation, but since the British navy continued to execute all its provisions, this act, apparently just, had no favorable result for the neutrals or for us. On July 27, 1793, the government, reversing the exception made in favor of the United States, declared that the decree of May 9 would receive its full and entire execution, as regards neutral ships loaded with foodstuffs or merchandise belonging to enemy powers.¹²⁹

BOOK IV

Decrees relating to the navy. — Orders issued by Jean-Bon-Saint-André and Bréard. — Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse sets sail from Brest with twenty-six vessels. — He must protect the return of a convoy expected from America under the escort of Rear-Admiral Van-Stabel. — Engagements of May 28 and 29, 1794. — Battle of June 1. — Seven vessels remain in enemy hands. — One of them, the *Vengeur*, sinks on the battlefield. — Retreat of the French army. Meeting with Admiral Montagu. — Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse anchors on June 11 in the harbor of Bertheaume. Van-Stabel arrives on June 13 with the convoy. - Study of the battle of June 1st. Imprisonment and dismissal of several squadron captains. - Barère's speech to the Convention. - Episode of the *Avenger*. - Report of Captain Renaudin. - Measures taken by Jean-Bon-Saint-André upon the squadron's return. - Capture of the ship *Alexander* by Rear-Admiral Nielly's division. - Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse sets sail at the end of December 1794. - Return of the Brest squadron. - Losses it suffered without encountering the enemy. - Report to the Convention on the cruise of the Brest squadron - Departure for Toulon of Rear-Admiral Renaudin.

I

The Constituent and Legislative Assembly had brought disorder to all departments of the military navy. There was reason to believe that, on this point, there was nothing left to do. The Convention showed that, in the path of disorganization, it could go further than the assemblies which had preceded it. On January 28, 1794, Jean-Bon-Saint-André requested, in the name of the Committee of Public Safety, the suppression of the infantry and artillery regiments. This representative made, on this occasion, a speech which may be among the most curious documents of this period.¹³⁰

He did not hesitate to say that the situation imposed on these regiments was in formal contradiction with the basis of our institutions, equality. He was indignant at the thought that these troops had the exclusive privilege of defending the Republic at sea. All soldiers of France had this right and they would demand it, he said, if it were not granted to them. Thus, according to the representative, a naval gunner, that is to say, a soldier trained in the difficult art of firing cannons at sea and specially assigned to this service, became a sort of aristocrat, something like a man of the ancien régime. To show that we are not exaggerating, we reproduce below a passage from Jean-Bon-Saint-André's speech. "The essential basis of our social institution," said the representative, "is equality; you must bring all parts of the government, military and civilian, back to it. In the navy, there is an abuse which the Committee of Public Safety is asking you to destroy through me. There are, in the navy, troops which bear the name of marine regiments. Would this body of troops have the exclusive privilege of defending the Republic at sea? Are we not all called to fight for liberty? Why could not the victors of Landau, of Toulon, go to our fleets to show their courage to Pitt, and lower the flag of George? This right cannot be contested; they would claim it themselves, if their arms were not serving the fatherland elsewhere. Since they cannot enjoy it, we must at least leave them the prospect that they will be able to use it."¹³¹

It was after this speech, which would have been laughable to men with even a mediocre knowledge of the subject under discussion, that the marine infantry and artillery regiments disappeared. The corps, which until then had borne the name, were placed on the same footing and under the same regime as the other volunteer battalions. The garrisons of maritime fortresses ceased to be permanent; the Minister of War was authorized to change them as often as circumstances required. The Convention decided that, henceforth, the necessary detachments would be taken from the National Guard battalions, following a deliberation of the executive council, to form the garrison of ships. The men called upon to embark on the fleet, the decree stated, had to be trained in cannon fire. It was to them that the new organization entrusted the artillery service on our ships. Before 1789, we had gunner-sailors; they had been replaced, under the Constituent Assembly, by naval gunners who were not worth their salt. The Convention dismissed the latter to put in their place battalions of national guards. With such measures, what success could we expect in the struggle with England? Since his arrival in Brest, Jean-Bon-Saint-André was, as far as the navy was concerned, the absolute master of men and things. All his proposals, whether relating to personnel or equipment, received a favorable reception from the Committee of Public Safety. He had been able to apply, without encountering any opposition, the ideas he expressed in his speeches to the Convention. He was given complete freedom of action to dismiss the old officers and to replace them under the conditions he indicated as most likely to give France a good navy.¹³²

Whether he had some doubt about the value of his work, or he considered fear to be the indispensable complement of any military organization, he wanted to regulate, in a precise manner, the conduct that the commanders of warships should adopt in the presence of the enemy. On February 2, 1794, a decree was issued, issued on his proposal, deciding that the captain and officers of a ship of the line lowering its flag in front of enemy ships, whatever their number, would be declared traitors to the fatherland and punished by death, unless this ship ran the risk, as a result of its damage, of sinking, and that, on the other hand, there remained only the time necessary to save the crew. The captains and officers of frigates, corvettes, and other light vessels surrendering to a force not twice their own were to be subject to the same penalty.

Jean-Bon-Saint-André would have liked the Convention to decide, before the squadron's departure, that any captain who allowed the line to be cut would be punished by death. It must not be, he said, that at the moment of an action, the generals of the Republic be abandoned as were the Conflans, the d'Estaings, and so many others. The general answers to you, on his own head, for the execution of your orders; that is the rule. But his responsibility disappears if the law does not guarantee him obedience to the instruments you place in his hands. One could never have believed that M. de Conflans would be defended by a member of the Convention. As for d'Estaing, the representative was still stuck with the legend that this general officer had been abandoned by his captains. We have shown in the history of the French navy during the American War of Independence what should be thought of this assertion.¹³³

As we will see later, it was only after the battle of June 1, 1794, that the Convention issued a decree in accordance with the representative's thoughts.

On February 15, 1794, the Convention had decided, on the proposal of Jean-Bon-Saint-André, that the flag would be made up of the national colors, arranged in three equal bands, placed vertically. The blue was attached to the pole of the flag, the white in the middle, and the red floated in the air. The minister had been ordered to take the necessary measures to ensure that the new flag was flown, on May 20, on all the buildings of the Republic.

II

Our diplomatic agent in the United States had received, at the end of 1793, the order to ship large quantities of flour to France. A considerable convoy was to leave New York in the first days of April, escorted by a division of two ships and four frigates, commanded by Rear Admiral Van Stabel. The government decided that the Brest squadron would meet the convoy. Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse was to give battle, if necessary, to ensure the return of the ships expected from America. The execution of the orders of the Committee of Public Safety was placed under the close supervision of the representative of the people, Jean-Bon-Saint-André, embarked on the *Montagne*, a three-deck vessel, aboard which flew the flag of the commander-in-chief.¹³⁴

On May 16, the Fleet left Brest. The crews' enthusiasm was extreme, and if enthusiasm had been enough to ensure victory, one could predict easy triumphs for our squadron. But the will to do good, as energetic as one supposes it to be, is powerless at sea when it is not based on order, discipline, and knowledge. Now, on the Republican fleet, exposed to encountering the enemy, a few days after leaving port, the majority of the crews were composed of men who had never been to sea. These beginners, who had arrived a few months earlier on our ships, had barely done any exercises in the harbor. These same men were to replace the naval gunners, disembarked following the decree issued on January 28, 1794. Finally, most of the officers and captains were sailing in a squadron for the first time. This fleet, which constituted France's main force in the struggle against Great Britain, was composed of twenty-five vessels, four of which had three decks. Rear-Admiral Bouvet had his flag on the one hundred and twenty-strong ship *Le Terrible*.

Admiral Villaret had orders to await the convoy led by Van-Stabel one hundred leagues offshore, at the latitude of Belle-Ile. He set sail to position himself in this position. Rear-Admiral Nielly, who was cruising on the coast with a division of five vessels, was to join the fleet. On May 16th, there was a light breeze, the sea was calm and no incident disturbed the departure of our ships. Jean-Bon-Saint-André, very satisfied, wrote to Bréard on the 18th:¹³⁵

“All is well, my dear colleague, there is zeal, goodwill, and attention in the fleet.” A few days later, the representative’s language underwent a slight modification. “The fleet,” he said, “is well disposed, the service is going well; some officers lack instruction, I don’t know any who lack goodwill.” In a letter dated May 24, he expressed himself thus: “There is a lot of ardor in the fleet, instruction among several captains, but there are three or four whose ignorance is truly beyond what one could say.”

The corvette, the *Société-Populaire*, one of the fleet’s flies, was doing very poorly, and Jean-Bon-Saint-André sent a new captain on board this vessel, where he left the first captain, the one he had just dismissed, to fulfill the functions of a second. This measure, borrowed from the methods of the oriental pashas, shows how far the omnipotence of the delegates of the Convention extended. On May 26, the representative recorded the following observations in his journal: “At the moment when day broke, the three columns were poorly formed and, in general, the captains were not careful enough to close the line and the officers on watch, either poorly instructed, negligent or timid, found themselves at much too considerable distances. “This observation was very sensible, but why had this representative said, at the tribune of the Convention, that “our sailors, disdaining in a spirit of reflection and calculation learned developments, would probably judge it more appropriate and more useful to attempt these boarding combats where the French were always victorious and thus to astonish Europe with prodigies of intrepidity.”¹³⁶

We do not cite these quotes with the intention of contradicting Representative Jean-Bon-Saint-André. That would be too easy, and, one might add, completely pointless. What we want is to draw from the past a useful lesson for the future, by showing, through conclusive examples, that noise, grand words, declamation, and even a sincere desire to serve one's country cannot replace knowledge.

Jean-Bon-Saint-André had organized the squadron according to the ideas he presented to the Convention, and as soon as he was at sea, he saw things from a completely different perspective. Unfortunately, the mistake had been made and could no longer be repaired. Although the weather was very fine, the ships, due to the poor composition of the crews and the inexperience of the staff, suffered continual damage. The *Scipion*, after having broken its foremast and main topsail yard since leaving Brest, reported damage to its foremast which required it to be replaced. I assumed that the masting of this ship, formerly the *Saint-Esprit*, wrote Jean-Bon-Saint-André in his journal, had been stored in the stores since the last war, had been poorly cared for and that the wood had become overheated. This negligence, like so many others, was part of the system of destroying the French navy through the carelessness and neglect of all the parts that composed it. "It was not possible that Jean-Bon Saint-André regarded what he said as the expression of the truth. This accusation, although formulated in a somewhat vague manner, was obviously addressed to the government of Louis XVI.¹³⁷

The representative must have had a strong faith in the ignorance of those who were called upon to read his newspaper, to claim that the regime, to which France owed its participation in the American War of Independence, was continuing, by devious means, the destruction of naval equipment. If the most capable of all the delegates to the Convention on our fleets spoke such poverty, what language the others must have used!

The *Patriote*, which had separated from the Nielly division to which it belonged, was sighted on the afternoon of March 26. This vessel took its place in Admiral Villaret's squadron. The *Patriote*, after passing twice aft of the *Montagne* to inform the admiral that it had sick ships, left the line. Its captain asked to be excused from holding his post. The order was given to him to take it back. Jean-Bon-Saint-André had no doubt that the captain of the *Patriote* had voluntarily left Nielly's division with the intention of returning to Brest. The army's encounter had prevented the execution of this plan. The representative had this captain express his discontent, and he recorded in his journal the surprise he felt at seeing an officer, charged with an important command, express the desire to separate from the army and thus expose himself to falling into the hands of the enemy. The *Patriote* was commanded by Captain Lucadou, whom we have already had the opportunity to speak of. He was one of the signatories of the letter in which Villaret-Joyeuse was designated as the most capable officer to command the Brest squadron. The initiative he had taken in this circumstance, his conduct towards the staff and the crew of one of the vessels coming from Toulon and even more the protection of the Société Populaire de Brest had earned him the rank of ship captain and the command of the *Patriote*.¹³⁸

III

Lord Howe left Portsmouth on May 2nd with twenty-five vessels. A few days later, he detached Admiral Montagu with six vessels to escort a merchant fleet offshore. After completing his mission, this flag officer was to meet the ships we were expecting from America. On the 5th, Lord Howe appeared at the entrance to the Iroise. Having ensured that our squadron was still in port, he headed for the Bay of Biscay. After a few days cruising, the English, not seeing any French sails, returned off Brest. They then learned that Admiral Villaret had put out to sea. Worried about the fate of the ships commanded by Admiral Montagu, Lord Howe put on sail to join us. On the 20th, he learned from neutral vessels where we were. On the 28th, in the morning, his scouts reported our squadron. It was running broad reach, coming from the south, with a fresh southwest breeze. The two fleets close to the wind on port tack. Around four o'clock, they took on starboard tack. Admiral Villaret, who wanted to draw the enemy away from the presumed passage of the convoy, was running under full sail. Lord Howe formed, with his best marchers, a light division, charged, under the direction of Admiral Pasley, with harassing our rearguard.¹³⁹

At the end of the day, a very lively fight ensued between our rear ships and Rear Admiral Pasley's division. The *Révolutionnaire*, disabled, gave way during the night and headed for Rochefort. The *Audacious*, which had suffered serious damage in this rearguard action, headed for an English port. The two armies remained on the same tack during the night. On the 29th, at seven o'clock in the morning, the English tacked to windward by the countermarch. Lord Howe hoped that his fastest ships would get up far enough to windward to engage our rearguard. Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse thwarted his adversary's plan by imitating his maneuver. These successive maneuvers quickly reduced the distance separating the two squadrons. A little after nine o'clock in the morning, the French admiral signaled his vanguard to close fire on the enemy. The action began around ten o'clock. The fighting had been going on for some time without Admiral Villaret showing any intention of taking part in the combat with the center and rearguard. Lord Howe, believing the moment to be favorable to cut the French line, gave the order to his army to tack to wind ahead by the counter-march. This movement was poorly executed. Several ships belonging to the vanguard, as a result of their damage, found themselves obliged to tack to windward. Moreover, some captains misunderstood the signal hoisted on board the *Queen Charlotte*. The English admiral tacked his own ship, thus indicating to his squadron the objective he was pursuing. During the course of this evolution, Admiral Villaret prescribed an incoming movement which brought him close to the enemy, then he again closed to the wind on port tack.¹⁴⁰

The English and French, continuing on opposite sides, exchanged a few broadsides. Several English ships, led by the *Queen Charlotte*, which carried Lord Howe's flag, made sail and kept close to the wind in order to reach our rearguard. The English three-decker cut our line between the seventh and eighth ships, from the rearguard. It was followed by the *Bellerophon*, *Leviathan*, *Orion*, and *Barfleur*. Our last two ships, *Indomptable* and *Tyrannicide*, were surrounded. The three-decker, *Terrible*, was also compromised. This ship, which had lost its foremast in a pitching swell, had fallen to leeward. The *Indomitable* and the *Tyrannicide* defended themselves with the greatest energy, but they could not hold out long if they were not rescued. Admiral Villaret, realizing the critical situation of these vessels, multiplied the signals to bring his squadron to form the line of battle with their tacks to starboard. The vanguard, which should have started the movement, was maneuvering with difficulty due to the damage it had received in the morning's engagement. Admiral Villaret gave the order to his flag captain to tack, then he signaled to form a line of speed, without regard to the positions. This evolution, which was executed promptly, freed the *Indomitable*, the *Terrible* and the *Tyrannicide* but it made us lose the advantage of the wind. The firing ceased around three o'clock.

The *Montagnard*, leader of our squadron, had been very badly treated. Its captain had not dared to take the starboard tack for fear that this maneuver would cause the fall of its mast. The frigate *Seine* stayed near the *Montagnard* to observe it.¹⁴¹

The *Indomitable* and the *Tyrannicide* suffered serious damage. The first of these vessels, towed by the frigate *Brutus*, headed for Brest, escorted by the *Mont-Blanc*. Several English vessels had suffered, but none of them sailed away. This engagement inspired the following reflections from Jean-Bon-Saint-André: "I must give credit to the officers commanding the vessels; they all showed courage; if they had added a little instruction, the day would have been glorious for them and very useful to the Republic. But the slowness of the maneuvers, the continual misunderstandings, the limited resources when it is necessary to plan with force and execute with audacity, this is what robbed us of the brilliant success we had hoped for." "It was unfortunate for France that Jean-Bon-Saint-André learned so late that squadron staffs cannot be improvised. If he had known this earlier, one must believe that he would have been less hasty in dismissing the old officers.

On May 30, Rear-Admiral Nielly joined Admiral Villaret with three ships, *Trajan*, *Sans-Pareil*, and *Téméraire*. That day, a very thick fog enveloped the two fleets. When it dissipated on the afternoon of the 31st, the *Montagnard* had disappeared. Rear-Admiral Nielly received orders to place his flag on the three-decker ship, *Républicain*, and take command of the third squadron. Rear-Admiral Bouvet, who had his flag on the *Terrible*, commanded the second. On June 1st, at daybreak, the enemy was seen maneuvering to form up. At eight o'clock in the morning, the two armies were running, tacks to port, with winds from the south to the southeast, the English to windward of the French.¹⁴²

Our squadron was arranged in the following order: *Convention*, *Gasparin*, *America*, *Téméraire*, *Terrible*, *Impétueux*, *Mucius*, *Aeolus*, *Tourville*, *Trajan*, *Tyrannicide*, *Juste*, *Montagne*, *Jacobin*, *Achille*, *Vengeur*, *Northumberland*, *Patriote*, *Entreprenant*, *Neptune*, *Jemmapes*, *Trente-et-un-Mai*, *Républicain*, *Sans-Pareil*, *Scipion*, and *Pelletier*. All these ships were of the seventy-fours except for the *Terrible*, *Républicain*, and *Montagne*. The first two carried one hundred and ten guns and the third one hundred and twenty. The second squadron or vanguard consisted of the first nine ships, the first or center the next eight, and the third or rearguard the other nine. The enemy's fleet was disposed as follows: *Caesar*, eighty, *Bellerophon*, *Leviathan*, *Russell*, seventy-four, *Royal Sovereign*, one hundred, bearing the flag of Vice-Admiral Graves, commanding the vanguard, *Malborough*, *Defence* of seventy-four, *Impregnable* of one hundred, *Tremendous* of seventy-four, *Barfleur* of one hundred, *Invincible*, *Culloden*, *Gibraltar*, seventy-four, *Queen Charlotte*, one hundred, bearing the flag of the Commander-in-Chief, Vice-Admiral Howe, *Brunswick*, *Valiant*, *Orion*, seventy-four, *Queen* of one hundred, *Ramillies*, *Alfred*, *Montagu*, seventy-four, *Royal George*, one hundred, carrying the flag of the rearguard commander, Vice-Admiral Hood, *Majestic*, *Thunderer*, of seventy-four, and *Flory*, of one hundred.

At eight o'clock in the morning, the English let themselves to be carried by a movement all at once. Determined to deliver a decisive battle, Lord Howe gave his fleet the order to cross the French fleet.¹⁴³

The English ships were to pass astern of the ships corresponding to them in our fleet, then luff and form a line of battle to leeward of ours. The first cannon shots were fired by the *Cesar*, leader of the English line, which attacked the *Convention*, which occupied the same position in our fleet. The *Bellerophon*, *Leviathan*, *Russel*, *Royal Sovereign*, *Malborough*, and the *Defence* successively engaged the *Gasparin*, *America*, *Téméraire*, *Terrible*, *Impétueux*, and *Mucius*. The English ships *Impregnable*, *Tremendous*, *Barfleur*, *Invincible*, *Culloden*, and *Gibraltar* played a somewhat insignificant role. The *Invincible* and *Barfleur* fought the *Juste*. The *Queen Charlotte* steered on Admiral Villaret's ship. The English three-decker maneuvered to pass between the *Montagne* and its stern mate, the *Jacobin*. Captain Bazire, of the *Montagne*, set his main topsail and topgallant sail on the mast, with the aim of blocking the *Queen Charlotte's* path. At the same time, Captain Gassin, of the *Jacobin*, was straining with sails to prevent the English three-decker from passing on his bow. The two vessels, the *Jacobin* and the *Montagne*, suddenly found themselves very close to each other. A collision seemed inevitable. Captain Gassin made an approach, which allowed the English admiral to cut the line. The position of the *Queen Charlotte*, between the *Montagne* and the *Jacobin*, was very perilous. By the admission of English historians themselves, Lord Howe could not escape the alternative of lowering his flag or seeing his ship sink beneath his feet. This was not the case. Our artillery, poorly directed, did him little harm. Shortly after, the incidents of the battle separated the *Queen Charlotte* from the *Montagne*. The *Valiant* was the adversary of the *Achille* which had taken the place of the *Jacobin*.¹⁴⁴

The *Brunswick* attempted to cut our line, but the *Vengeur*, by forcing her sails, forced her to hold the wind. These two vessels fell upon each other. They had been engaged in a fierce battle for several hours when the *Ramillies*, which had barely fired a few cannon shots, joined the French vessel's opponent. The English ships, taking up their positions in a successive movement, were not all able to comply with Admiral Howe's orders and give broadsides to the ships corresponding to them in our squadron. Those following the *Brunswick* attacked the vessels when they came within cannon range, managing to spot them amidst the smoke. The *Orion*, number seventeen among the English, fought the *Patriote*, number eighteen in our line; the *Alfred*, number twenty, engaged the *Entreprenant*, number nineteen. The *Royal George* was opposed by the *Républicain*, and the *Glory* fought the *Sans-Pareil*. At nine o'clock, the action became general. A swirl of smoke enveloped both fleets, and the English and French captains were left to their own devices.

Around ten-thirty, there was a clearing. Shortly after, the smoke having completely dissipated, the entire battlefield could be seen from the deck of the *Montagne*. The ships of our squadron occupied the following positions: *Téméraire*, *Terrible*, *Entreprenant*, *Neptune* and *Trente-et-un-Mai* were in line with the flagship either on its front or on its rear. We could see, to leeward and a little forward, four ships, among which was the *Tyrannicide*, towed by the *Trajan*, and, a little behind these ships, the *Jacobin* and the *Patriote*.¹⁴⁵

Finally, three ships, *Convention*, *Gasparin*, and *Pelletier*, which had veered during the battle, were astern and to windward of the English. We have indicated the position of fifteen ships. The others, namely the *America*, *Impétueux*, *Juste*, *Achille*, *Northumberland*, *Sans-Pareil*, *Mucius*, *Jemmapes*, *Scipion*, *Républicain*, and *Vengeur*, were, according to the expression used by Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse in his report, "mixed up with the English." It follows from the above that seventeen vessels, including those surrounded by the enemy, had fought with determination. These vessels belonged to the vanguard, the center, and the rearguard. It could also be said that there had been, in the three squadrons, captains inferior to the role they were called upon to play. Transported into the midst of incidents for which their maritime education had not prepared them, they had found themselves unable to make the necessary decisions. The vessels, forming a leeward group, were commanded by officers who had continued to run ahead during the combat, letting the ships, wholly or partly dismasted, which they encountered on their route, bear away to overtake them. In short, the captains who had not been openly attacked from the very beginning of the action had not, when the smoke had hidden the admiral and the entire battlefield from their sight, taken an intelligent and sufficiently active part in the fight.

The situation of the ships near the enemy was extremely critical. Admiral Villaret signaled his force to veer and, executing this maneuver himself, he ran on the starboard tack, followed by several ships.¹⁴⁶

Maneuvering, he ran on the starboard tack, followed by a few ships. This offensive movement freed *Mucius*, *Jemmapes*, *Scipion*, and *Républicain*. Seven ships were still in the middle of the English fleet. To rescue them, it would have been necessary to sail upwind, and Villaret-Joyeuse estimated that, in the state his squadron was in, he could not tack up to the disabled vessels. The firing ceased around two o'clock. The *America*, *Impétueux*, *Juste*, *Achille*, *Vengeur*, *Northumberland*, and *Sans-Pareil* were abandoned. The *Vengeur*, which had fought fiercely, sank shortly after being put to sea, dragging into the abyss not only the wounded but also part of its crew. The French squadron remained stranded on the battlefield. At eight o'clock in the evening, Admiral Villaret headed for Brest with nineteen vessels, five of which were under tow. On June 9, several large vessels were sighted. It was an English squadron, nine vessels strong, commanded by Admiral Montagu. The British Admiralty, warned by the *Audacious* that the fleets were in contact, had given this admiral, who had arrived at Plymouth a few days earlier, the order to put to sea again. The English headed southwest, pursued by the French. The representative, the admiral and the chief of staff of the army passed on the frigate *La Proserpine*. "The observations that I had made during the combat of June 1st," wrote Jean-Bon-Saint-André, "had convinced me that the general should not remain in the line at the moment of combat. It seemed to me that after having made his general dispositions, as soon as the firing began, it became impossible for him to grasp the respective positions of two fleets in order to make prompt and useful decisions."¹⁴⁷

Such a state of affairs is obviously absurd." Thus, after a few days spent in a squadron, Jean-Bon-Saint-André had decided that the position of the commander-in-chief, on a day of battle, was not on his own ship but on a frigate. The representative, had he made a more in-depth study of the matter, would not have reached this conclusion. The same measure had been taken by Marshal de Castries in 1782, but this arrangement, disapproved of by the navy, had not been maintained. At six o'clock in the evening, we were still far from the enemy. Admiral Villaret, assuming that his adversary's goal was to draw him out to sea, resumed his original course. The French squadron anchored in the harbor of Bertheaume on June 11.

On the 3rd, the fleet had communicated with the brig *La Mouche*, dispatched by Admiral Van Stabel. This vessel had left the Chesapeake on the same day as the convoy. In accordance with the admiral's orders, *La Mouche* had remained cruising for fifteen days off the Azores. The merchant fleet, however slow its progress, could not be far away. The retreat of our squadron delivered it to Howe's army or to the division we had driven off on the 9th. We had found seven vessels in Bertheaume harbor. Among those that Admiral Villaret brought back, *Eole*, *Tourville*, *Jacobin*, *Pelletier*, *Téméraire*, and *Trajan* had suffered little. We therefore had thirteen vessels immediately available. Having no precise information on Howe's fleet, we could not venture out to sea, but it was the duty of the representative and Admiral Villaret to defend the approaches to the Iroise against the forces of Admiral Montagu.¹⁴⁸

A few days earlier, when the French squadron, having given up pursuing the English division, was heading back to Brest, Jean-Bon-Saint-André wrote in his journal: "The information we had just received of an enemy squadron cruising at the mouth of Brest Bay required the most prompt action. I thought it appropriate to join Bertheaume's ships with those of the army that were seaworthy and to go immediately to rid our coasts of this inconvenient cruise." Why did Jean-Bon-Saint-André not carry out this very wise plan? It is also surprising that the representative did not immediately send the disabled ships and the wounded to Brest. In any case, two days passed during which the army made no movement. Jean-Bon-Saint-André had left for Brest, leaving Villaret without instructions. During the night of June 12-13, a large number of fires were seen in the Raz de Sein. At daybreak, the convoy appeared. Rear-Admiral Van-Stabel had crossed, on May 30, the area where the two fleets had had an engagement the day before. On June 2, encountering the three-decker *Montagnard* and the frigate *Seine*, he had ordered these two vessels to follow him. Fearing to find the English at the entrance to the Iroise, he had headed for the Penmarcks, which he had recognized on the 12th at six o'clock in the evening. During the night, the ships comprising his convoy, the prizes, and the escort crossed the Raz de Sein. It was with this magnificent maneuver that Van Stabel ended his campaign.¹⁴⁹

Jean-Bon-Saint-André states in his journal that the United States convoy anchored in Bertheaume harbor twenty-four hours after the squadron. According to an official dispatch sent by Admiral Villaret to the Naval Commission in Paris, the convoy arrived on June 13. There can be no doubt about the error made by Jean-Bon-Saint-André. It was indeed during the 11th and 12th that our ships remained stationary, while Admiral Montagu was cruising at the Brest landings. If the merchant fleet, expected from America, had escaped this final peril, it was neither Villaret nor the representative, but Van-Stabel who deserved the credit. On June 14, the convoy and all the ships we had at Bertheaume entered Brest.

IV

The naval battle of June 1, 1794, is one of the most important of this war. Its results exerted a considerable influence on subsequent maritime events. Finally, it has been judged very differently in our country, poorly informed by the documents of the time. This is why it is appropriate to subject this first encounter of the Republican navy with the naval forces of Great Britain to careful examination. Lord Howe attacked us on June 1, with great resolve. The engagement of May 29 had given him an awareness of his strength and a measure of our weakness.¹⁵⁰

He no longer had before him the squadrons that had forced England to recognize the independence of the United States of America. The signals he made to his fleet, at the moment it bore down on ours, indicate the goal he intended to achieve. Each ship was to cut the French line by passing astern of the ship corresponding to it in our squadron, then luff and engage that same ship by positioning itself to leeward. While, on the one hand, the intention of delivering a decisive battle was clear, on the other hand, there was, in this maneuver, no plan aimed at bringing superior forces to bear on any part of our line in order to crush it before it could be rescued. Some ships crossed our line; others attempted this maneuver without succeeding. The majority fought us to windward. However that may be, it would be a mistake to attribute to Admiral Howe combinations which he did not think of and, in any case, which his fleet did not execute. The encounter of June 1st is, on the contrary, one of those sea battles, very numerous moreover, in which the action of the captains and the valor of the ships play the principal role. We have shown the manifest inadequacy of the staffs and the crews of the French fleet, and, on the other hand, our weakness from the point of view of maneuver. There is no need to return to these two points, but it remains to examine the effects of the artillery. The English counted, in the battles of May 28th and 29th and June 1st, 293 killed and 855 wounded. About five thousand men were put out of action on our squadron. This figure included the losses suffered by the ships that Admiral Villaret had abandoned to the enemy.¹⁵¹

The hulls and masts of our ships suffered extensive damage. Several French vessels were rendered powerless, while the ships they were fighting suffered only minor damage and had barely a few men killed or wounded. The English ships, thus made available, joined their companions to overwhelm those of our ships whose resistance continued. We will demonstrate with examples taken from the incidents of June 1st that this is how things happened.

As soon as the first cannon shots were fired, the *Queen Charlotte* steered towards the French flagship. This three-decker was exposed to broadsides from the ships forming our center, and particularly to the fire of the *Juste*, the *Montagne*, and the *Jacobin*. After crossing the line, the *Queen Charlotte* engaged several ships. At the end of the day, her losses amounted to forty-two men killed or wounded. The French flagship had three hundred men out of action. The *Royal-Sovereign*, carrying the flag of Rear-Admiral Graves, number five in the English line, attacked the *Terrible*, a three-decker ship which occupied the same rank in ours. The flag of Rear-Admiral Bouvet flew on board the latter vessel. The *Terrible* fought with the greatest vigor; nevertheless, after an engagement of an hour, she sailed away with her mainmast and mizzenmast dismasted. The *Royal-Sovereign* wanted to pursue her adversary, but she was stopped by the ship *La Montagne* with which she exchanged cannonballs. Thus, the *Royal-Sovereign*, after having forced a ship of her force to retreat, was still able to fight *La Montagne* and send broadsides to some other ships.¹⁵²

This three-decker suffered, on June 1, six men killed and twenty-two wounded. If we add to these figures the losses suffered on May 29 by the *Royal-Sovereign*, one of the four ships that suffered the most that day in the English fleet, we arrive at a total of fourteen killed and forty-four wounded for the two battles. Maneuvering played no part in the fight between the *Terrible* and the *Royal-Sovereign*; only the cannon played a role. We could easily multiply facts of this nature, because the whole battle is there. When we compare the number of men put out of action in the two fleets with the decree of the Convention, abolishing, on the proposal of Jean-Bon-Saint-André, the special corps responsible for serving the artillery of our ships, the events we report become clear. We understand how difficult the fight was for our sailors in the deplorable conditions in which an unintelligent administration placed them. Just criticism could be addressed to our adversaries. The captain of the *Cesar*, leader of the English fleet, had not complied with the order which prescribed to fight at close quarters. Brought before a court martial, he lost his command. A ship, which did not have a man hit, the *Thunderer*, was sighted, at eleven o'clock in the morning, to windward and at a great distance from the battlefield, by one of the flagships which signaled it to fire. It is surprising that Lord Howe, who had a large number of ships ready to fight, did not prevent Admiral Villaret from disengaging the *Scipion*, the *Mucius*, the *Jemmapes* and the *Républicain*.¹⁵³

Finally, is it not surprising that the enemy remained motionless in the presence of our squadron from two o'clock in the afternoon until the end of the day, content with the success they had achieved? In summary, the study of the engagements of May 28 and 29 and the general action of June 1 shows the fortunate chances reserved for our squadron, had it been more solidly organized, and it makes us regret even more the ignorance that had presided over the arming of our ships.

Some historians have criticized Admiral Villaret for not having freed the dismasted vessels that were in the middle of the English fleet. Others have said that the member of the Convention, Jean-Bon-Saint-André, had opposed his all-powerful veto to the admiral's formally expressed desire to come to the aid of the seven French ships that remained to windward of our fleet. These assertions do not seem justified to us. Admiral Villaret said in a letter addressed to the Committee of Public Safety: "I had seven or eight ships, which were in front of me, turn to return to the charge and join the rearguard, of which I had no knowledge. The movement was executed. But what was my surprise to see all the ships that formed this part of the fleet dismasted, pell-mell with the English. Unable to gain enough wind to cover them, I hauled abeam of them, to give those who had already re-rigged some poles an opportunity to reach me. "That the ships, whose masts were in good condition, had the possibility of moving towards the enemy, was not in doubt. These ships would have quickly reached, by tacking, a group of dismasted ships. But that was not the question."¹⁵⁴

The question was whether Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse was able to bring sufficient forces to cover vessels that were incapable of taking part in a new engagement. The firing, which had begun around nine o'clock in the morning, as we have said, had completely ceased by two o'clock in the afternoon. At that moment, the English vessels, obeying Admiral Howe's orders, were maneuvering to surround the disabled vessels or prizes, for some of ours had lowered their colors. Of the nineteen vessels remaining to Admiral Villaret, the *Mucius*, the *Jemmapes*, and the *Scipion* were dismasted. The *Terrible*, which flew Admiral Bouvet's flag, had only one lower mast. The *Republican*, which Admiral Nielly was sailing, was in the same situation. The *Tyrannicide*, dismasted on May 29, was being towed by the *Trajan*. Finally, the *Trente-et-un-Mai* and the *Montagne*, due to their damage, were unable to get upwind. Consequently, if the admiral had wanted to free the ships that could not reach him, he would have had only twelve or thirteen vessels at his disposal for this attempt. What was the situation of our adversaries? Of the twenty-five vessels making up the English fleet, one, the *Brunswick*, had disappeared. This vessel, following its combat with the *Vengeur*, had fallen to leeward. The captain of the *Brunswick* had been seriously wounded. The officer called to replace him, despairing of rejoining his squadron, had headed north. Fourteen ships had their lower masts and topmasts intact. The *Queen Charlotte* and the *Bellerophon* were without topmasts. Two English ships no longer had lower masts, and three had only one. So much for the equipment.¹⁵⁵

As for personnel, the losses suffered by the English squadron were not great enough to prevent Lord Howe from continuing the fight. From this perspective, one could even say that they were insignificant.

It follows from the above that the enemy vessels, with the exception of the *Brunswick*, the *Marlborough*, the *Queen Charlotte*, the *Defence*, and the *Royal George*, were in fighting condition. Five English three-deckers could line up. It is therefore difficult to believe, as has been stated, that Admiral Villaret would have been able to tack with the ships capable of following him to allow the disabled vessels to join him. Unless one assumes that the English fleet would remain immobile, to achieve this result, it would have been necessary to fight a second battle under the conditions we have just described. Did Admiral Villaret judge that he would not succeed in this enterprise? There is reason to believe so. In any case, it must be considered certain that he yielded to considerations of this nature when he resigned himself to the cruel sacrifice of abandoning seven ships to his adversary. However, if he did not believe it possible to move again towards the English army, he remained on the battlefield ready to receive the attack of Lord Howe, if the latter wished to recommence the fight. Our situation, in this last hypothesis, would have been better since several ships, unable to tack, would have been able to fire cannons. It is needless to say that Villaret-Joyeuse did not renounce the offensive, in the afternoon of June 1, without having first consulted the delegate of the Committee of Public Safety. We cannot say what happened between the admiral and the representative, and indicate the share of responsibility incumbent on the latter in the maneuver of the squadron.¹⁵⁶

But, on the other hand, no reliable testimony shows Villaret-Joyeuse yielding to the imperious injunction of Jean-Bon-Saint-André ordering the retreat. It is possible that the representative reminded the admiral of the government's instructions to avoid any encounter with the enemy except in cases where the safety of the convoy required it. As we had no news from Van-Stabel, this consideration was obviously one of the elements of the issue that the political leader and the military leader of the fleet had to debate, at a time when to renounce further combat was to declare the game lost. But it seems beyond doubt that this decision, based on purely maritime reasons, was taken by the admiral and the representative, both of whom were in complete agreement on this point.

Shortly after the return of our ships to the harbor of Brest, a party formed in the general staff which judged very severely the operations of the campaign and the conduct of the principal officers of the fleet. It is said that the faults of Admiral Villaret had led to the loss of the battle fought on June 1st. Finally, as was the practice at that time, whenever one wanted to act strongly on public opinion, the words of treason and cowardice were uttered. The ambitious and the malcontented renewed the maneuvers which had been so successful on the return of the squadron commanded by Admiral Morard de Galle. They hoped to create, at the head of the fleet, vacancies which they would be called upon to fill. The close union of Jean-Bon-Saint-André and Villaret thwarted these calculations. It was unjust to attack the general officers. Rear Admirals Nielly and Bouvet had set an example of bravery and devotion.¹⁵⁷

The commander-in-chief had done everything in his power, as admiral, to take advantage of a poor squadron. Moreover, the *Montagne*, over which his flag was flying, had lost three hundred men on June 1st. Criticisms were leveled at the squadron's inactivity upon its return to Brest. These were deserved, but they were all the less likely to be accepted since the culprit, in this instance, was Jean-Bon-Saint-André.

V

The critical moment had come for the representative. Omnipotent during the squadron's sortie, he found himself back in command upon returning to port. The fleet had put to sea under the most brilliant auspices. The Committee of Public Safety, very ignorant of naval matters, had believed, on the assurances given by Jean-Bon-Saint-André, that the naval force was invincible. However, after a short campaign, it returned having left seven ships in the hands of the enemy. How could we have suffered such a disaster? This is what had to be explained. The representative was responsible for our defeat to the Committee of Public Safety, since the organization of the squadron was his work. The admiral, too, found himself in a difficult position. Having been defeated, he risked his head. Villaret-Joyeuse had sent to the Minister of the Navy, to inform him of the results of the battle of June 1, a report containing numerous inaccuracies.¹⁵⁸

It seemed that the admiral was primarily concerned with protecting himself and the representative. The calculated wording of this document placed the responsibility for the day on the captains. Jean-Bon-Saint-André had written on June 9 to his colleague, Prieur (de la Marne): "The most terrible, the bloodiest battle recorded in the history of the navy took place yesterday between the two fleets. The arrangements were well made, everything boded well for us. The captain of the *Jacobin* disrupted everything... The general fulfilled his duty perfectly." On June 11, Prieur de la Marne wrote to the Committee of Public Safety: "There is above all only one outcry against the captain of the *Jacobin*. He is dismissed, along with several others whose conduct will be examined by the revolutionary tribunal. It appears that Villaret showed the greatest intrepidity and composure, and that, without the cowardice of the vanguard, far from losing ships, we would have taken those of the English. It is a fact that three English ships, including one with three decks, sank during the combat. There is no need for us to point out the ease with which Prieur de la Marne, who did not attend the battle of June 1, speaks of captains who showed themselves unworthy of the post entrusted to them and of the cowardice of the vanguard, without which, far from losing ships, we would have taken those of the English which were dismasted. Who would have dared, after this violent attack against the captains of the squadron, to ask these members of the Convention for an account of the measures they had taken to put our fleet in a position to fight against that of England?"¹⁵⁹

By seizing, after all the events, the easy role of accuser, the Committee of Public Safety and its delegates placed themselves at a height where no one could reach them. They baffled criticism and escaped all responsibility. In any case, the cause of the representative and the admiral triumphed. It was on the captains that the severity of the Committee fell. Captain Bompard, of the *Montagnard*, who had separated from the fleet, was imprisoned. The same was true of Captain Gassin, of the *Jacobin*, accused by Jean-Bon-Saint-André of having allowed the line to be cut. Captains Langlois, du Tourville, Tardy, du Gasparin, Berrade, du Pelletier, Lucadou, du Patriote, Allary, de la Convention, Dumoutier, du Trajan, were dismissed. The officers thus affected were, in general, of little interest. Most of them had obtained the ranks of which they were deprived, by making violent speeches in clubs. In appointing them, a much greater injustice had been committed than in dismissing them from the service. However, the government, with more reflection, would not have made and unmade officers with such ease; it would not have dismissed, without trial, those with whom it was dissatisfied. The regime of good pleasure, substituted for that of the law, deprived the new general staff of the consideration it needed all the more because it was less capable.

Among the dismissed officers was Captain Lucadou. We have described how he had been appointed captain and commander of the *Patriote*. During the short campaign of the Brest squadron, Captain Lucadou had not distinguished himself either by his zeal for the service or by his devotion to public affairs. Jean-Bon-Saint-André had recorded in his journal the unpleasant reflections inspired in him by the conduct of his former protégé.¹⁶⁰

Captain Lucadou, far from accepting his disgrace with resignation, continued to protest the treatment he was receiving. In one of the many petitions he addressed to the government to obtain reinstatement in his rank, he cited the main maritime events that had occurred since the beginning of the war, and he explained our failures by the betrayal of the former officers. Arriving at the battle of June 1, 1794, he said: "Must I trace for you the cowardly betrayal of this battle, under Villaret-Joyeuse, always protected by the naval offices, who constantly victimized the Republicans who, by their bravery, had saved the honor of the flag in this action." Now, the man who spoke in this way was one of the signatories of a letter already cited, in which the representatives on mission in Brest were strongly urged to entrust the command of the army to Villaret-Joyeuse. Finally, far from saving the honour of the flag in the affair of 1 June 1794, as he said in his memoir, he had fought very little. Captain Lucadou, who was in Paris during the Vendémiaire days, fought the royalists in the ranks of the republican troops. Nevertheless, in 1814, he did not feel the slightest hesitation in addressing to Malouet, then Minister of the Navy, a new petition with the aim of obtaining his reinstatement in the corps of officers or a position. He spoke, in his memoir, only of his unalterable attachment to royal authority. He had, he said, retained these feelings during the Revolution, and it was for having expressed them too frankly that he had been stripped of his rank by Jean-Bon-Saint-André.¹⁶¹

He even dared to add that he had refused a three-decker offered to him to take the *Patriote* "for the sole reason that the unfortunate monarch whom France had just sacrificed had boarded this vessel at Cherbourg."

We have said that the ship *Révolutionnaire* had become separated from the fleet on the night of May 28 or 29, after having fought a rearguard action against several enemy vessels. This vessel had sixty-two men killed and eighty-six wounded; Captain Vandonghen and two officers had died in this engagement. Shortly after the English vessels had moved away, the *Révolutionnaire* dismasted. Fortunately for it, the winds were blowing from the southwest. The new captain headed downwind towards the coast of France, with a sail set on a section of the lower mast. Encountered the next day by the *Audacieux*, of the Nielly division, the *Révolutionnaire* was taken in tow and taken to Rochefort. Thus, on the one hand, this vessel had fought bravely; on the other hand, by escaping during the night, it had avoided inevitable capture. Instead of recognizing that the conduct of the captain, officers and crew had been not only correct but worthy of praise, Jean-Bon-Saint-André wrote in his journal, dated May 29: "While developing the line, we noticed that the *Révolutionnaire* had separated from us. Had this vessel suffered from the cannonade of the day before and was its condition such that it could not continue to follow the fleet? ... Besides, could he separate from the fleet without having asked for and received permission and without having made known the needs that necessitated it." The surprise that the disappearance of the *Revolutionary* seemed to cause to Jean-Bon-Saint-André was very strange.¹⁶²

This vessel had withstood the fire of the light division formed by Admiral Howe to harass our rearguard. Since the fighting had begun several hours before the end of the day, the admiral and the representative could not have been unaware of what had happened. It was obvious, and no one in the fleet doubted it, that this vessel had been abandoned. At the time this rearguard action was taking place, the French fleet was straining its sails in an attempt to keep the English away from the presumed passage of the convoy. It is likely that the admiral and the representative deemed it more in keeping with the spirit of their instructions to sacrifice this vessel than to run the risk of an engagement in the vicinity where we were. The admiral and the representative might have had excellent reasons for acting in this way, but it was contrary to the most vulgar loyalty to accuse the Revolutionary of having left his post. However, the officers (we have said that the captain had been killed) and the masters of this vessel were imprisoned. They were released after five months of detention, but no satisfaction was granted to them.

On June 1, 1794, the squadrons of France and England had been in contact for four days. Neither officer nor sailor on board our vessels was unaware of the true strength of the enemy. However, Admiral Villaret wrote to Paris that the English fleet was thirty ships strong. "On June 1st," says Jean-Bon-Saint-André in his journal, "the English fleet appeared to windward of us, on a front line, bearing downwind on the fleet of the Republic. It was then formed of twenty-eight ships of the line and we noticed that there were still some to windward, forming a reserve corps."¹⁶³

The captain of the *Proserpine* assured us that he counted thirty-four, eight of which were three-decked. Barère went further. Concerned with freeing the Committee of Public Safety from responsibility, he was not afraid to say that the English fleet was fourteen ships stronger than ours. Having no victory to announce, he wanted to show our squadron fighting heroically against overwhelming forces. Finally, he spoke of the results of that day in terms vague enough to allow one to believe that the enemy's losses were no less than ours.

The *Vengeur*, of seventy-four, was among the French vessels which, on the afternoon of June 1, 1794, had failed to break through the English squadron. This vessel had fought a fierce battle against the *Brunswick*. It had, in addition, had to withstand fire from two vessels, one of which had three decks. Dismasted of all its masts, unable to fire a cannon shot, water having invaded its powder bunkers, the *Vengeur* lowered its flag. The position of this vessel was so critical that its captain, not believing he had the right to sacrifice the rest of his brave crew and his wounded, had the flag lowered to indicate to the enemy that he was in urgent need of help. Lord Howe, in his report to the British Admiralty, said: "The *Vengeur*, of seventy-four, sank almost immediately after being put to sea; the English boats saved two hundred and sixty-seven men." At the moment when the *Vengeur* disappeared into the waves, Captain Renaudin was on board an enemy ship. On his arrival in England, he had a report drawn up of the events in which the *Vengeur* had taken part since leaving Brest.¹⁶⁴

A passage from this document contained the following: "The ship *Vengeur* was approaching the moment when the sea would engulf it. The danger was increasing in the most alarming manner, despite the crew's efforts to pump and draw water. We saw two of our vessels emerge from the enemy group, one of which, the *Trente-et-un-Mai*, passed close to us. It gave rise to some hope of salvation among us, but these soon vanished. It was preparing to take us in tow when the English managed to force it away from our shore. The water had reached the steerage; we had thrown several cannons into the sea, and the part of our crew that was aware of the danger was spreading the alarm. These same men, whom all the enemy's efforts had not frightened, trembled at the sight of the misfortune with which they were threatened. We were all exhausted with fatigue; the flags had been moored at half-mast. Several English vessels having put their boats into the sea, the pumps were soon abandoned. These boats, arriving alongside, received all those who were the first to throw themselves into them. Hardly had they moved away than the most dreadful spectacle presented itself to our eyes: those of our comrades who had remained on the *Vengeur*, their hands raised to the heavens, implored, with piteous cries, help which they could no longer hope for. Soon both the vessel and the unfortunate victims it contained disappeared. In the midst of the horror that this heart-rending scene inspired in us, we could not help but feel a mixture of admiration and pain. As we walked away, we heard some of our comrades still making wishes for their country. The last cries of these unfortunates were those of Long Live the Republic."¹⁶⁵

They died while saying them. Several men returned to the water, some on planks, others on masts and other debris from the ship. They were rescued by a cutter, a rowboat, and some canoes, and taken aboard the English vessels. This report was dated June 19. The report of the English admiral had appeared eight days earlier, that is to say on the 11th. However, on July 10, when he could not be unaware of the truth, Barère, in announcing the catastrophe of the *Vengeur*, said at the tribune of the Convention: "Imagine the ship *Vengeur* pierced by cannon shots, opening up on all sides and surrounded by English tigers and leopards, a crew composed of wounded and dying, fighting against the waves and the cannons. Suddenly the tumult of the combat, the terror of danger, the cries of pain of the wounded cease; all come up or are carried on deck. All the flags, all the pennants are hoisted; the cries of long live the Republic, long live liberty and France are heard from all sides; It is the touching and animated spectacle of a civic celebration rather than the terrible moment of a shipwreck. For a moment, they must have deliberated over their fate. But no, citizens, our brothers no longer deliberated; they see the English and the Fatherland. They would rather sink than dishonor it with a capitulation; they do not hesitate; their last wishes are for liberty and for the Republic, they disappear." The legend of the *Avenger* was born from this story.

We see, from the above, how difficult it is, by consulting only official documents, to know the truth. According to Barère, the French squadron covered itself in glory.¹⁶⁶

According to Jean-Bon-Saint-André, we fought fiercely; however, one ship, the *Jacobin*, made a maneuver that compromised the fleet. Prieur de la Marne attributes the loss of the battle not only to the captain of the *Jacobin* but also to the cowardice of the vanguard, and he announces the swift punishment of the culprits. We must point out these excesses of language and these calculated inaccuracies. The truth is sufficient to explain our defeat. If we recall the situation of the Brest squadron at the time of its departure, the loss of the battle of June 1st is only too easy to understand. We want to hold the sea without sailors, fire cannons without gunners, and sail in a squadron with officers who, for the most part, have no knowledge of naval tactics. How, under such conditions, can we be surprised that success does not meet our expectations?

Jean-Bon-Saint-André thought, upon his arrival in Brest, that training, warmth of spirit, a quick glance, as he said in a speech delivered on February 6, 1793, to the Convention, should, among French sailors, suffice for everything. His illusions on this point were not long-lived. Not only had he come to recognize the necessity of method, but he wanted to regulate everything. He decided that henceforth there would be, on ships, a training course for officers. Every day at sea, unless the service opposed it, the captains were ordered to gather the members of their staff in the council chamber and to question them on the principles of tactics and squadron maneuvers.¹⁶⁷

Knowledge of the laws relating to the navy, the decrees of the National Convention, and the orders issued by the representatives of the people, relating to the service of ships and naval forces, were included in the program drawn up by Jean-Bon-Saint-André. While at anchor, the same instruction was given to commanders by the major general. Captains were instructed to keep track of the progress made by the officers under their command. The same recommendation was addressed to major generals regarding captains. This information was transmitted to the minister. This new regulation, although it was not intended to exert any influence, heralded, on the part of its author, a return to wiser ideas. There were captains, and they were the majority, who knew nothing. What lessons could these people give to their staffs? Finally, most of the officers appointed since 1793, having no educational background, were, for that very reason, unable to successfully follow the courses established by Jean-Bon-Saint-André. This representative had the Committee of Public Safety decide that general officers, commanders-in-chief and subordinates, would be required to fly their flag, in combat and during major maneuvers, or even in the marching order, if they deemed it appropriate, on one of the frigates attached to the army.

Jean-Bon-Saint-André, recalling the *Jacobin* maneuver on June 1, issued a decree worded as follows: "No ship captain will allow the line to be cut. If the enemy maneuvers to cut it in front of or behind him, he will maneuver to prevent it, and he will allow himself to be boarded rather than suffer it." The commander of a vessel, at whose post the line is found to be cut, will be punished by death.¹⁶⁸

This decree, submitted to the Convention, was adopted by that assembly.

VI

The end of 1794 passed without any further encounters between the squadrons of Admirals Howe and Villaret-Joyeuse. Shortly after the battle of June 1, 1794, the English reappeared on our shores. In the first days of September, Admiral Howe appeared off Ushant with thirty-four ships of the line. Frigates were stationed off Brest to monitor our movements. However, isolated vessels and divisions of our squadron managed to put to sea. At the beginning of November, Rear Admiral Nielly was cruising, about a hundred leagues west of Cape Finistère, with the seventy-four-gun ships, the *Tigre*, on which he had his flag, the *Droits-de-l'Homme*, *Marat*, *Pelletier* and *Jean-Bart*. On the 6th, during the night, this division chased two vessels in which, when daylight came, they recognized English vessels. One of them managed to escape. The other, the *Alexander*, a seventy-four-gun ship, was bombarded by the *Droits-de-l'Homme*, the *Marat* and the *Jean-Bart*, and lowered its flag. The *Alexander* had significant damage to its masts, and its losses amounted to about forty men killed or wounded. The three French ships that had fought it were badly damaged, and each of them had lost as many men as the English ship.¹⁶⁹

This result indicates the value of our gunners. Admiral Nielly headed for Brest, where he entered a few days later with the captured vessel.

The Committee of Public Safety strongly insisted that the fleet commanded by Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse put back to sea. The minister wrote numerous dispatches to hasten the repair work. But the port authorities, due to insufficient supplies, encountered the greatest obstacles in getting our vessels ready to sail. At the beginning of December, the government decided that six vessels, placed under the command of Rear-Admiral Renaudin, would be sent to Toulon. The Brest squadron was to sail with this division. In an attempt to sail on December 24, the three-decker ship, the *Républicain*, was lost on the Maingan rock. On the 29th, Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse led his ships to Camaret. The next day, he put to sea. The fleet comprised thirty-five vessels, four three-deckers, three eighty-gun and twenty-eight seventy-four-gun, thirteen frigates and a few corvettes. After escorting Rear-Admiral Renaudin's division offshore, Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse was to hold the sea off our coast for fifteen days. The dispatch of the Brest squadron on a cruise at that time of year denoted, on the part of those who directed the navy, the most complete ignorance of this service. Among the vessels gathered under the flag of Admiral Villaret, some, due to the insufficiency of the port's resources, had only very incompletely repaired the damage resulting from the battle of June 1, 1794. Several of them had twin masts and rigging in poor condition.¹⁷⁰

Others were old vessels that no longer had the necessary sturdiness to withstand bad weather. These latter vessels could have been used, but only on the condition that they were reserved for a less arduous campaign. The poor state of the equipment was compounded by the inexperience of the personnel. Finally, the shortage of supplies was such that the administration of the port of Brest had had to overcome the greatest difficulties in providing a month's supply to all the vessels. Rear Admiral Renaudin's ships were the only ones with supplies for several months. There was not a single detail of this situation that had not been brought to the attention of the minister. Moreover, officers, summoned to Paris and consulted on the advisability of a new sortie, had vigorously protested against any measure of this kind. It was then that the Committee of Public Safety, dissatisfied with the opposition it encountered and wanting, on the other hand, to prevent any new objections from arising, had sent Admiral Villaret the imperative order to set sail. The squadron received several gales from the northeast to the southeast which pushed it out to sea. On these ships in poor condition, damage followed one another in rapid succession. Three vessels, the *Neuf-Thermidor*, the *Scipion* and the *Superbe* sank in the middle of the squadron. It was with great difficulty that the crews were saved with the exception of a few men who were drowned. The *Neptune* only avoided the same fate by running aground on the Perros mudflats; it could not be raised. The captain of the *Téméraire* succeeded in bringing his ship, which was on the point of sinking, to Saint-Malo. The *Fougueux* put into port at the island of Groix.¹⁷¹

Supplies had to be taken from the ships bound for Toulon to give to the other vessels. Admiral Renaudin thus found himself prevented from following his destination. The winds having fortunately shifted to the northwest, the squadron was able to sail for Brest, where it anchored on February 2nd. The *Majestueux* and the *Révolutionnaire* had seven feet of water in their holds. If the northwest winds, which had allowed the squadron to return to Brest, had blown twenty-four hours later, these two vessels would have disappeared like the *Neuf-Thermidor*, the *Superbe*, and the *Scipion*. The corvette *Daphné*, seventy merchant ships, and fifteen hundred prisoners were the trophies of the deep winter cruise. The sailors thus designated this unfortunate sortie. Such advantages were scant compensation for such a great disaster.

When Jean-Bon-Saint-André, invested with extraordinary powers, arrived in Brest in October 1793, most of the captains had been removed from their ships by his order. Some had perished on the revolutionary scaffold, others had been imprisoned or dismissed. After providing for their replacements, he hastened to inform the Committee of Public Safety that the Republic could now count on the Brest squadron. Our fleet had put to sea and returned after fighting on June 1st. At that moment, Jean-Bon-Saint-André was no longer as satisfied with his work. These officers, whose merits he had previously praised, he denounced to public condemnation. Eight ship captains were imprisoned or dismissed. New officers took the place of those who had just been so shamefully expelled.¹⁷²

After this second purge, it seemed that the composition of the general staff left nothing to be desired. However, upon his return from the long winter cruise, Admiral Villaret wrote to the minister: "I cannot hide from you, and the representatives of the people will not hide it from the Committee of Public Safety, that we have ship captains below mediocre." The officers commanding the frigates were the subject of very strong complaints. Not only were they incompetent, but they lacked any military spirit. Their only concern was to seize enemy trade. Accusations of plundering weighed heavily on most of them. Our frigates, said Villaret, flee any vessel that does not offer "some food for their greed." He asked the minister "to crack down on the weak and the plunderers." From the above, one can judge the value of the reforms made to the personnel by Jean-Bon-Saint-André. Admiral Villaret also said: "The penal code is insufficient. If we do not give the petty officers the means to activate the crews, we will never achieve that precision and speed in maneuvers on which the success of combat depends." In accordance with orders from Paris, the port of Brest used all its resources to put Rear-Admiral Renaudin's ships in a state of readiness to sail. On February 22, this general officer headed for Toulon with six vessels. Lord Howe, who commanded the Canal squadron, had remained in the port during the bad weather our fleet had experienced offshore. He put to sea on February 14th, at the head of forty-two vessels and an almost equal number of frigates and corvettes. Under the protection of this immense armament, the convoys destined for the East and West Indies set sail for their destination.¹⁷³

After becoming certain that we had returned to Brest, Lord Howe led his army back to the ports of England.

On May 26, 1794, the members of the Committee of Public Safety, yielding to feelings of hatred, difficult to explain in politicians, had submitted to the Convention a draft decree ordering that, henceforth, no more English or Hanoverian prisoners would be taken. This proposal was passed by the Assembly. We will not dwell on the nature of this measure, which was rescinded on December 30.¹⁷⁴

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BOOK V

Admiral Martin leaves Toulon. His entry into the Gulf of Juan. – Capture of the seventy-four-gun ship, *Berwick*. – Fine conduct of the frigate *Alceste*. – Admiral Hotham sets sail from the harbor of Livorno with fourteen ships. – Encounter of the two squadrons off Cape Noli. – The *Mercure* and the *Sans-culottes* separate from the fleet. – Engagement of March 16. – We lose the eighty-gun ships *Censeur* and the seventy-four-gun ship *Ça-Ira*. – Fine defense of these two ships. – The English return to Livorno and the French to Toulon. – Admiral Martin sets sail on June 8 with seventeen ships. – Engagement of July 12. – Audacious maneuver of the *Alceste*. – Explosion of the *Alcide*. – Anchoring of the French squadron in the bay of Fréjus. – The English go to Corsica and the French return to Toulon.

I

Rear Admiral Martin left Toulon on June 5, 1794, with the eighty-gun *Sans-Culottes*, *Heureux*, *Timoléon*, and the seventy-four-gun *Duquesne*. He had orders to cruise along the coast. Naval forces under the command of Admiral Hood supported the operations of the British troops in Corsica. This general officer, informed by his frigates of the departure of our squadron, set sail with the three-decker ships, *Victory*, on which he had his flag, *Britannia*, *Princess-Royal*, *Windsor-Castle*, *Saint-Georges*, and the seventy-four gun, *Alcide*, *Terrible*, *Egmont*, *Bedfort*, *Captain*, *Fortitude*, *Illustrious* and *Berwick*. On June 10, the two squadrons met. The English covered themselves with canvas to reach us.¹⁷⁵

At daybreak on the 11th, the two fleets were a few leagues apart. The enemy's numerical superiority required Admiral Martin to avoid any engagement. He headed for the Gulf of Juan, where he anchored in the afternoon. Only one English vessel, the twenty-eight-gun frigate *Dido*, came within cannon range of our ships. Admiral Hood resolved to follow our squadron and engage it at anchor. With the arrival of a calm, he was unable to carry out this plan. The French immediately took the necessary measures to present themselves broadside to the enemy if they decided to enter the bay. Batteries, armed with cannons disembarked from the ships, were built to defend the ends of the embossing line. A few days passed during which the calm and contrary winds kept the English out to sea. When the breeze became favorable, our position seemed to Admiral Hood much too strong for him to attack us with any chance of success. He set sail for Corsica with four ships. His lieutenant, Vice-Admiral Hotham, remained in observation off the Gulf of Juan with nine ships, three of one hundred guns and six of seventy-four. In the first days of November, a gale from the east having forced the enemy to move away, Admiral Martin brought his squadron back to Toulon. At the beginning of this cruise, the frigate *Alceste* had fallen into our hands.

At the beginning of the year 1795, the squadron placed under the command of Admiral Martin was in the harbor of Toulon. As a result of the disorder which reigned in the ports since the beginning of the Revolution and the indiscipline of the seafarers, the sailors had disappeared.¹⁷⁶

There were barely three thousand sailors on this squadron, fifteen ships strong. Nevertheless, the Committee of Public Safety ordered Admiral Martin to be ready to sail. The intention was to retake Corsica from the English. Ten thousand men embarked on transport vessels assembled at Toulon. The squadron, accompanying the convoy, was to sail to the Bay of Saint-Florent. Once the conquest of Corsica was complete, the admiral was ordered to take four thousand men and land them on the Italian coast to reinforce Shérer's army. Such was the plan drawn up by the Committee of Public Safety. The representative Letourneur, from the Channel, charged with overseeing this undertaking, could not hide from himself that it would be difficult to execute. To go out with the convoy, without being master of the sea, was to expose oneself to great risks. The representative wrote to Paris to ask for authorization to go, with the squadron alone, to meet the English. He added that the convoy would set sail for its destination, as soon as we had beaten the enemy, which did not seem doubtful to him. The representative said: "We must seek out the enemy and fight him. The English fleet is, at most, fourteen ships strong, whose crews are exhausted and incomplete. Ours is fifteen ships, and by means of the extraordinary resources that I have drawn from our land army to compensate for the lack of crews, the service is assured. Finally, we have our incendiary means, the presence of the representatives of the people, and even more the desire to win and the energy of the republican troops. "Representative Letourneur had gone on board several vessels, whose crews he had, he himself said, was electrified.¹⁷⁷

Soldiers and sailors had "spontaneously" sworn to win or die, if circumstances required, to uphold the honor of the tricolor. The representative, who was quite ignorant of naval matters, and who, perhaps also, was not gifted with a very penetrating eye, had based his conviction on these testimonies. He had complete confidence in the success of the campaign.

While the representative was informing the Committee of Public Safety that he had satisfactorily settled the personnel issue, Admiral Martin wrote to Dalbarade, Commissioner of the Navy and Colonies: "The Mediterranean squadron, numbering fifteen vessels, four frigates and three corvettes, is about to depart. Representative Letourneur has just given me the order to set sail as soon as the wind permits. Our crews have been completed by 2,400 men taken from the Corrèze battalion, the 104th and the 18th demi-brigade. It is not possible to have ships more poorly equipped with sailors than those from the port of La Montagne. The number of soldiers and novices, who have not been to sea, amounts to 7,500 men, out of a total of 12,000 men, forming the armament of the fifteen ships. By reducing, from the total, 1300 men, officers or petty officers, there remains approximately 2,724 sailors distributed among all the ships. We have several ships which cannot have, at their 36-pounder cannons, two gunner sailors, that is to say the chief and the loader. The situation of the ships, from the material point of view, did not inspire Admiral Martin with less serious concerns. His observations were not taken into account and the order to send the squadron to sea arrived at Toulon.¹⁷⁸

Rear Admiral Martin set sail on March 1, 1795, with the ships *Sans-Culottes* of one hundred and twenty, *Ca-Ira* and *Tonnant* of eighty, *Victoire*, *Alcide*, *Barras*, *Censeur*, *Conquérant*, *Duquesne*, *Généreux*, *Guerrier*, *Mercure*, *Heureux*, *Peuple-Souverain* and *Timoléon*, of seventy-four. Representative Letourneur continued to be satisfied with all things. In informing the Committee of Public Safety of the squadron's departure, he expressed the most perfect confidence in victory. "I hope," he said, "that by the first courier I will be able to announce to you the defeat of the English and the recapture of Corsica." A few days after its departure, the squadron arrived in sight of this island. On the 8th, during the day, a large vessel was sighted. It was the seventy-four-gun ship, the *Berwick*, which had left the Gulf of Saint-Florent in the morning. Joined by our advanced vessels, the English vessel lowered its flag. According to the representative Letourneur, the *Berwick* had no other adversary than the *Alceste*. "Three of our frigates," he wrote, "have received the order to chase." The *Alceste*, commanded by the brave Lejoille, lieutenant, took the lead, and, maneuvering skillfully, cut off the enemy vessel, attacked it with intrepidity, and so disarmed it in its masts and rigging that after a quarter of an hour of combat it forced the *Berwick* to lower its flag, in the presence of our entire fleet which was hunting en masse and several ships of which were already on the point of reaching it. The English say that the *Berwick* was attacked by three frigates and that it was only after being joined by two ships, from which it received the first broadsides, that it lowered its flag.¹⁷⁹

In any case, the *Berwick* suffered only one casualty, its commander, and six wounded, which does not seem to indicate that it continued its resistance for long. The officer who had taken command of the *Berwick* after the death of Captain Adam Little John was acquitted by the court-martial before which he appeared upon his return to his country. Lieutenant Lejoille and Midshipman Florimond Rainval were appointed, the first to captain and the second to ensign. These two promotions were confirmed by the government. Finally, the National Convention decreed, on the report of the Committee of Public Safety, "the honorable mention of the conduct of the crew and staff of the frigate *Alceste*, in the combat delivered by it, on March 8, 1795, at the entrance to the Gulf of Saint-Florent, to the English ship *Berwick*, of seventy-four guns, which had surrendered after a quarter of an hour." After sending the *Berwick* to Toulon, Admiral Martin headed for the coast of Italy in search of the enemy. The representative had only one fear: that the English would not accept combat.

Vice-Admiral Hotham had replaced Lord Hood at the head of Great Britain's naval forces in the Mediterranean. This general officer was in the harbor of Livorno with fourteen vessels, when, on March 8, he was warned, by an express, sent from Genoa, that a French squadron had been sighted, on the 6th, off the coast of the Sainte-Marguerite Islands. The same day, one of his corvettes appeared offshore, having, at the top of its masts, the following signal: "A fleet in the northwest."¹⁸⁰

Admiral Hotham put to sea the next day with fourteen ships, thirteen English and one Neapolitan.

On the 10th, the English squadron reached the vicinity of Cape Noli. It was sailing close-hauled, tack to port, with southwest winds. During the day, his frigates signaled the French to windward, in full view. Forty-eight hours passed, during which the two squadrons remained at a great distance from each other. By the morning of the 12th, they had closed in. In accordance with the arrangements made by the conventional government following the battle of June 1, 1794, the admiral and the representative crossed over to the frigate *La Friponne*. For a moment, it seemed that the fleet commander and the delegate of the Committee of Public Safety had decided to give battle. The squadron made a move to arrive, but shortly afterward, it returned to windward. During the night, the weather was bad. The *Mercure*, of seventy-four, lost its main topmast in a squall. It took tack to the other side, and by daybreak, it was out of sight. On the 13th, in the morning, the *Ça-Ira* boarded [collided with] its forward sailor, the *Victoire*. The *Ça-Ira* lost both its topmasts, and fell to leeward of the line. Since morning, the English squadron had been straining its sails to get upwind. The frigate *l'Inconstant* was not far from the *Ça-Ira*. With a precision and skill that did him the greatest credit, the captain of this frigate passed to leeward of the French vessel, firing at it, then, veering, he sent her broadside again. A volley from the *Ça-Ira*, which had managed to clear her gun ports, which were clogged with debris from her masts and rigging, forced the frigate to withdraw.¹⁸¹

The latter had seventeen men disabled and serious damage to its hull. The frigate, the *Vestale*, which had received orders to take the *Ça-Ira* in tow, executed this maneuver very promptly. Several fast-moving English vessels were approaching quickly. Nelson, on the *Agamemnon*, was the first to arrive within cannon range of the *Ça-Ira*, and he immediately opened fire on the vessel. The *Captain* was quick to join the *Agamemnon*. The French fleet made an approach movement to cover the disabled vessel. The *Bedford* and the *Egmont*, which were following the *Captain*, exchanged cannonballs with our rearguard. Vice-Admiral Hotham, due to his distance, was unable to support the engaged ships. He signaled for the rally and the action ceased. The English squadron reformed its line of battle with its tacks to port.

At daybreak on the 14th, the *Sans-Culottes* was discovered missing. This vessel had fallen to leeward during the night. Fearing capture, it had headed for Genoa. It was calm and the English were a few miles northwest of the French. The *Ça-Ira*, towed by the *Censeur*, was near the enemy's vanguard. It was, it seems, contrary to Admiral Martin's orders that the *Censeur* had the *Ça-Ira* in tow. "The ship *Censeur*," wrote the representative Letourneur, "who was in front, received the order to give prompt assistance to the *Ça-Ira*. He took no notice of it. We went to her stern to order it again, and, through a misunderstanding that is difficult to understand, he thought he understood that it was a matter of going to give the tow to the *Ça-Ira* which had already freed itself. In vain, he was told, by the frigate *Arthémise*, to return to his post and leave the tow to the *Vestale*."¹⁸²

Around five thirty in the morning, a light northerly breeze arose, which allowed the English to approach these vessels. The *Captain*, of seventy-four, had taken the lead of the hunters. At six thirty, the battle began between this vessel and the two French vessels. Around eight o'clock, the *Captain*, having signaled to be rescued, was taken in tow by a frigate. The *Bedfort*, arriving shortly after the *Captain* at the scene of the battle, was soon in the same position. A distress signal having appeared at the top of its masts, a frigate led it out of the fire. The admiral and the representative, who had been showing the greatest irresolution since the encounter with the English army, found themselves obliged to take a decision. They had to defend the *Censeur* and the *Ça-Ira*, exposing themselves to the risk of a general engagement, or resolve to abandon these two vessels. When the breeze, which our adversaries had received first, reached us, the admiral signaled to follow the movements of the leader. The *Duquesne* was charged with leading our ships between the English and the *Censeur* and the *Ça-Ira*. The two squadrons would have crossed, on opposite sides, the French running, their tacks to starboard, to leeward of the English who were holding the wind on their port tack. Whether captain Allemand had misunderstood the orders of the commander-in-chief, or whether the latter had not given sufficiently precise instructions for the execution of a maneuver of this importance, the *Duquesne* passed to windward of the English. The *Victoire* and the *Tonnant* followed it. The other vessels, once again taken by the calm, remained motionless.¹⁸³

Due to the wild breezes mixed with calm that had reigned since morning, most of the ships were unable to maneuver. Some English and French ships had closed in. During its evolution, the *Duquesne* came very close to the stern of an English frigate, the *Lowestoffe*, on which it opened fire. This frigate, in its position, could not direct a single one of its guns at the French vessel. The captain disembarked his crew. The officers and helmsmen remained on deck. Finally, the *Duquesne* completed its evolution and moved away. The *Lowestoffe* did not have a single man hit, but its stern, as well as its masts and sails, received a large number of projectiles. The *Duquesne*, *Victoire* and *Tonnant*, joined shortly after by the *Timoléon*, had a very lively engagement with the *Illustrious* and the *Courageux*, which had taken the lead of the English army after the retreat of the *Captain* and the *Bedfort*. The action lasted until our ships, which were passing slowly due to the light breeze, had overtaken the two English ships. If the engagement had continued, the *Illustrious* and the *Courageux* would have been obliged to surrender. These two vessels were in a complete state of disrepair. The first had lost its foremast, its mainmast and its mizzenmast. The foremast and the bowsprit remained standing, but both, hit by a large number of projectiles, were on the point of falling. The *Courageux* had lost its mainmast and its mizzenmast. The breeze having become fresher, the French vessels took up their posts in the waters of the leader. Cannon shots were exchanged between the two squadrons which continued on opposite sides.¹⁸⁴

After doubling the enemy line, the French headed west under full sail. The *Censeur*, Captain Benoist; and the *Ça-Ira*, Captain Coudé, dismasted, sinking, surrounded by enemies, lowered their flags. Both had fought with a heroism that would have been difficult to surpass. The *Censeur* and the *Ça-Ira* had committed mistakes, but after the day of July 14, they should be forgotten and remembered only for their glory.

Vice-Admiral Hotham, preoccupied with the damage to several ships in his vanguard, continued to sail, tack to port. He headed for La Spezia, with his prizes and the dismasted vessels in tow. The *Illustrious*, which was towed by the frigate *Meleager*, separated from its squadron on the night of March 17. Shortly after, the tow broke; the wind was blowing from the south-east with great violence. On the 18th, during the day, the frigate disappeared. The ship, unable to hold the sea, anchored in the Bay of Valencia, between Livorno and La Spezia. The cables having broken, the vessel was thrown ashore. Ships sent by Admiral Hotham picked up the crew. The *Illustrious*, unable to be raised, was given over to the flames. The French anchored in the Gulf of Juan where they had the satisfaction of finding the *Mercure* and the *Berwick*. The latter ship, the *Victoire*, the *Timoléon* and the *Alceste* were sent to Toulon to repair their damage. Admiral Martin put to sea with ten ships to protect the return of the *Sans-Culottes*. This ship left Genoa on March 16 and joined the squadron in the harbor of the Hyères Islands. Admiral Martin brought his squadron back to Toulon. He found, in the harbor, Rear-Admiral Renaudin who had arrived from Brest with the ships *Jemmapes*, *Montagnard*, *Trente-et-un-Mar*, *Aquilon*, *Tyrannicide* and *Révolution*.¹⁸⁵

Admiral Martin returned from this short campaign very discouraged. The setback he had suffered at Cape Noli was very serious, and he could not hide from himself the fact that the abandonment of the *Censeur* and the *Ça-Ira* had caused him to lose the confidence of his squadron. Admiral Martin had reached the senior ranks prematurely. Appointed lieutenant in 1792, he had become, in less than a year, captain and rear admiral. He himself declared that he did not have the necessary capacity to exercise command of a squadron whose importance increased every day. He wrote to this effect to the Committee of Public Safety, adding that he had only accepted command of our naval forces in the Mediterranean "out of pure obedience to the orders of the representatives of the people." He requested that Rear-Admiral Delmotte, the former chief of staff of Admiral Villaret, in the battle of June 1, 1794, be designated to replace him. Admiral Martin asked the Committee of Public Safety to leave him in the squadron as second in command, and he protested the zeal and activity that he would bring to the exercise of this function. For a moment, in Paris, the thought of replacing Admiral Martin was entertained. His successor would not have been Rear-Admiral Delmotte but Rear-Admiral Sercey. This project was not followed up, and Admiral Martin remained at the head of the Mediterranean squadron.¹⁸⁶

II

The English had captured the *Ça-Ira* and the *Censur*, but the *Illustrious* no longer existed, and we had captured the *Berwick*. The losses therefore seemed equal on both sides. However, there was no doubt that we had had an unfortunate campaign. On the 12th, we had not attacked, although we were free to do so, since we were to windward. We had fifteen ships and the English fourteen. It is true that the latter had four three-deckers, while only one ship of that rank was in our fleet. Admiral Martin's conduct was perhaps wise, considering the true value of our squadron, but it betrayed, in the eyes of the enemy, the little confidence we had in our own forces. The *Mercure* and the *Sans-Culottes* had separated from the fleet, while the latter was in the presence of the English. No incident of this kind had occurred among our adversaries. On the 14th, the *Censeur* and the *Ça-Ira* had put themselves in a bad position by their false maneuvers. The attempt made to free them had not succeeded. In short, we had not delivered a general battle and two ships had remained in the hands of the enemy. These results were far from meeting the hopes highly expressed by the government before the departure of the squadron. The Committee of Public Safety had lost somewhat of its terrible prestige.¹⁸⁷

The reign of Robespierre and Saint-Just was already long gone. However, Representative Letourneur was not without apprehension about how the events of this campaign would be received. His embarrassment was all the greater because, giving in to thoughtless enthusiasm, he had written to Paris as a man absolutely certain that the English squadron would be defeated and Corsica recaptured. In the report he sent to the Committee of Public Safety, the representative recalled the various incidents that had occurred from the day the English were sighted until the moment the French squadron had left the battlefield. He attributed the failure we had just experienced to the false maneuvers of the *Ça-Ira* in boarding the *Victoire*, to the error committed by the *Duquesne*, leader of the fleet, who had not executed the admiral's orders, and finally to the inferiority of our forces. According to the delegate of the Convention, the English squadron consisted of sixteen vessels. However, this was composed of fourteen vessels, thirteen English and one Neapolitan. It was difficult to believe that the number of enemy vessels in our army was not known very precisely, since we had remained for three days in their presence. The representative declared that the goodwill among the officers was not supported by experience or sufficient capacity. He added: "The law ordered Admiral Martin to move to a frigate at the moment of combat; I had to follow him there. The desire to be able, by itself, to give more precise orders, often put us within cannon range of the enemy. But circumstances demanded it and I would have been the first to urge him to put aside any particular considerations."¹⁸⁸

These last lines show how seriously the representative took his own character. He felt it necessary to say that he had not intended his greatness to prevent the admiral from fulfilling his duty. However, if anything could protect the representatives from the ridicule attached to the role they played on the squadrons, it was that they were in some danger.

The Committee of Public Safety had the duty to inform the Convention of the results of the Mediterranean squadron's sortie. The orator, charged with speaking on its behalf, approached the podium with the confidence of a man assured, in advance, that he would not be contradicted. The principal object of this sortie, he told the Assembly, was to meet the naval army of England, to fight it wherever it was found, to drive it from the Mediterranean and to establish freedom of navigation there. According to him, all measures had been taken by the Committee and by the various representatives of the people in the South to ensure the execution of this project. The Committee of Public Safety remained faithful to tradition. Its conduct deserved only praise. The aim it pursued was excellent, and the means placed at the disposal of the commander of the Mediterranean squadron allowed him to undertake everything. After having said that our failure had no other cause than the faults committed by several captains, the orator promised the Convention that justice would be done promptly and properly to the guilty. The composition of the personnel, their lack of training, from a maritime and military point of view, and the observations made before departure by the squadron commander were not discussed.¹⁸⁹

With the crews receiving congratulations, those outside the navy must have believed that they were at least adequate. The sailors could not have this illusion. They knew that, to fight, you need ships in good condition, capable sailors, skilled gunners, and staffs accustomed to order, military dispositions, and squadron maneuvers. We did not possess these elements, without which no military operation can be successfully carried out. It was fortunate that circumstances had not allowed Admiral Hotham to attack the French squadron with all his forces. In an all-out engagement, we would have run the risk of being destroyed. Admiral Hotham had shown extreme circumspection. This general officer was probably not suited to the improvised fleets of the Republic. Perhaps the memories of the American War still protected our squadrons. The defense of the *Censeur* and the *Ça-Ira* had saved our military honor. But we would have achieved a very different result if the crews' skill had matched their intrepidity, and how much we must regret the lack of intelligence of those who shed so much blood needlessly.

The enemy's losses, including all the ships that took part in the action, amounted to seventy-four killed and two hundred and seventy wounded. The *Illustrious* and the *Courageux* had withstood fire from some of our vessels. The former had twenty killed and seventy wounded, and the latter fifteen killed and thirty-three wounded. It was difficult to understand that the *Captain* and the *Bedfort*, which had fought alone for a fairly long time, the *Censeur* and the *Ça-Ira*, had the first only three killed and nineteen wounded, and the second seven killed and eighteen wounded.¹⁹⁰

Furthermore, the *Captain* and the *Bedfort*, after an engagement lasting about an hour, had withdrawn from the fire, having lost part of their masts. Was this result due to chance, which caused the shots that unskilled gunners directed into the hull to land on the masts, or was it because the gun commanders of the *Censeur* and the *Ça-Ira* had received orders to aim their guns at the masts and sails of the enemy vessels? We do not know the nature of the instructions given by the captains of the *Censeur* and the *Ça-Ira* to the officers commanding the batteries. But whatever hypothesis we adopt, there is one point that cannot be considered doubtful: the impotence of our ships, from the artillery point of view. After the destruction of the Toulon arsenal and the dispersal of the crews belonging to the squadron anchored in this harbor, at the time of the English occupation of the city, France could have been reduced to having only a small number of ships in the Mediterranean. But one cannot blame too severely these armaments, which were only concerned with quantity and never with quality. Now, in the navy, quantity is worthless if quality is not combined with it.

Representative Letourneur had brought a serious accusation against Captain Allemand, commanding the *Duquesne*, leader of the fleet. He had said in his report: "The general, wanting to take advantage of a gust of wind that we were beginning to receive, signaled to the fleet to form in battle formation on the *Duquesne* to free the two attacked vessels."¹⁹¹

But the *Duquesne*, which was the leader, far from carrying out the order, held the wind and passed to windward of the English squadron, instead of arriving between our two ships and the enemy force, which would probably have saved them. The reproaches leveled at the leader of the force do not seem sincere to us. The attempt made to free the *Censeur* and the *Ça-Ira* had not been serious. It had allowed the admiral and the representative to say that they had wanted to save these two vessels. It was difficult to give it any other weight. In any case, the report of Representative Letourneur placed a heavy responsibility on the ship of captain Allemand, commanding the *Duquesne*. A jury, appointed in accordance with the provisions of the law of 1790, was charged with examining the conduct of this officer. Commander *Allemand* was accused of not having obeyed the general's signals. This affair lasted several days. Fifty witnesses, belonging to the vessels *Duquesne*, *Timoléon*, *Victoire* and *Tonnant*, were heard. Forty-seven testified in favor of Captain Allemand. The jury declared unanimously that there was no reason to indict the commander of the vessel *Duquesne*, who should be immediately released and returned to his duties. The jury further decided that this judgment should be printed in one hundred and fifty copies. The same verdict was given in favor of Captains Cattefort, of the *Mercure*, and Lapalisse, of the *Sans-Culottes*, who had separated from the fleet, following damage to the masts of their vessels. The captains of the *Duquesne*, the *Mercure* and the *Sans-Culottes* regained possession of their commands, which the representatives, on mission to Toulon, did not dare to take from them.¹⁹²

The Committee of Public Safety was greatly angered by these acquittals, especially that of Captain Allemand. By declaring that there was no basis for indictment against this captain, the jury contradicted Admiral Martin and Representative Letourneur. Indeed, both had said that the *Censeur* and the *Ça-Ira* would have been saved if the captain of the *Duquesne* had complied with the orders he had received. While Captain Allemand deserved no blame, the abandonment of the two vessels fell squarely on the admiral. The Committee of Public Safety, fearing to offend the general feeling of the squadron, did not take any severe measures with regard to the three captains, but gave the order to monitor them and to remove them from their commands if they showed themselves to be "ignorant or undisciplined". The conduct of the officers commanding the two vessels, which remained in the hands of the English, was submitted to the examination of a military jury. Captain Benoist, of the *Censeur*, had manoeuvred badly. He had not realised either the situation of the fleet or the scope of the orders given to him. It was obvious that this officer did not have the necessary capacity to command a ship of the line. On the other hand, his ship had defended itself heroically and it was on this point that the jury's verdict was based. The latter declared unanimously that "the conduct of citizen Benoist was irreproachable, and that on the contrary the jury believed that this ship captain, having defended the ship of the Republic with the greatest bravery, had deserved well of the fatherland." The jury treated the brave Captain Coudé even better; we reproduce his declaration:¹⁹³

"The legally assembled jury, aware of the critical situation in which the ship *Ça-Ira*, commanded by Citizen Coudé, found itself on the 24th of Ventôse last, has declared and does declare, unanimously, that the bravery, intelligence, and wisdom displayed by this ship's captain in this battle and in all its operations earned him the esteem and veneration of all his comrades, which should earn him the honorable title of brave defender of the fatherland.

III

Government orders prescribed that repairs to the vessels that had taken part in the engagement of March 12, 1795, be urgently carried out. The Committee of Public Safety wanted Admiral Martin, taking with him the six vessels that had arrived from Brest, to return to sea as quickly as possible. He would have set out in search of Admiral Hotham, whom he would have fought with the advantage of numbers. New disturbances, which broke out in Toulon shortly after the squadron's return, halted work on the arsenal and once again disorganized the crews. Since the conventional army had recaptured Toulon from the English, the terrorist element had dominated the city. The 9th of Thermidor produced great unrest among the inhabitants and the arsenal workers. The leaders of the revolutionary party were not mistaken about the significance of the events that had just transpired. Realizing that power was slipping away from them, they resolved to use violence to regain it.¹⁹⁴

The representatives on mission to Toulon, and there were many of them at this time, had the duty to oppose any demonstration hostile to the spirit of the new government. Some played this role with more or less avowed sympathies for the insurgents. In any case, the delegates of the Convention had shown themselves too often to be in favor of violence for their call for wisdom and respect for the law to be heard. This language, which was surprising coming from their lips, had no influence on minds. On May 18, the crowd forced open the doors of the arsenal and removed the weapons. The agitators then proceeded to reorganize the National Guard. The Toulon garrison was small in number, and the troops, long in contact with the population, were not very reliable. The Jacobins considered themselves masters of the city, but this result was not enough for them. They intended to march on Marseilles and join forces with the southern insurgents.

Such an undertaking required considerable forces. In order to increase those at their disposal, the party leaders resolved to oppose the departure of the ships that were in the harbor. Since the beginning of the revolution, the men of disorder had found valuable auxiliaries in the sailors. After the return of Admiral Martin's ships, the Jacobins had neglected nothing to establish good relations with the crews. They had succeeded, except with regard to the vessels coming from Brest. Rear-Admiral Renaudin's division, anchored across the channel and ready to defend the entrance to the harbor if the enemy appeared, had little communication with the land.¹⁹⁵

This was not the case for the crews of the armed vessels in the Mediterranean. The sailors, under the pretext of deliberating on the dangers to their country, threatened, they said, by the machinations of the royalists and the émigrés, abandoned their ships and took part in all the popular demonstrations. They formed one of the strongest elements of the party resisting the new order of things. It was spread that the enemies of the Revolution, both internal and external, were only waiting for Admiral Martin's ships to sail into Toulon to slaughter the patriots. These rumors, as the leaders expected, caused great agitation. On May 20, the crowd went to the Hôtel de Ville and summoned the municipality to prevent the squadron from leaving. Representative Niou had replaced Letourneur de la Manche as the Convention's delegate to the naval army. He took a very bad view of the deputation charged with expressing the will of the population to him. He went to the Hôtel de Ville where he tried to persuade his audience that he was not allowed to transgress the orders of the government. The Jacobins were very skeptical on this point. In possession of omnipotence for several years, it seemed very strange to them that the sovereignty of the people, of which they had been told so much and in whose name they had exercised authority, was now nothing more than an empty word. The representative, pursued to his home by jeers, would have been very badly treated without the devotion of some inhabitants and the intervention of the army and navy officers who accompanied him. A battalion of national guard established itself at his door, and permission to leave was refused.¹⁹⁶

The firmness he had demonstrated abandoned him. He signed a decree suspending the squadron's departure. With this result achieved, the insurgents prepared to march on Marseille.

Due to the weakness of the garrison and the bad spirit within it, the authorities who remained loyal to the Convention watched helplessly as all this violence unfolded. Representatives Isnard, Cadroy, and Chambon, on a mission to the South, deployed great energy and activity to restore order. They raised battalions of the National Guard, gathered a few soldiers, and entered Marseille. From there, they advanced on Toulon. Detachments from the Army of Italy joined the conventional troops. On May 25, the people of Toulon, beaten at Beausset, abandoned their artillery and returned to the city in disorder. A few days later, the representatives found themselves at the head of considerable forces. The population of Toulon was in the grip of great excitement. It was necessary to disarm them quickly. Proclamations, reminding the inhabitants and workers of their sense of duty, were posted in Toulon. The troops, led by the representatives, entered the city on May 30. The news of the victory won on the 20th in Paris by the Convention had a salutary influence on the minds of the people. Most of the workers laid down their weapons and returned to their work. Since the beginning of the insurrection, a large number of sailors had abandoned their ships. Detachments of troops were tasked with searching for and arresting them. In Paris, the thought of fighting Admiral Hotham again had not been abandoned.¹⁹⁷

As soon as calm was restored in Toulon, and without giving time to replenish and reorganize the crews, the Committee of Public Safety ordered the squadron to put to sea. Admiral Martin set sail on June 7 with seventeen vessels: one three-decker, two eighty-gun, and fourteen seventy-fours. On July 7, the French squadron drove off an enemy division, composed of the *Agamemnon*, sixty-four-gun, bearing Commodore Nelson's guidon, a frigate, and a few lower-ranking vessels. The English headed for Cape Corsica. The next day, at daybreak, our scouts spotted a squadron in the Bay of Saint-Florent. Shortly after, the frigates reported twenty-two vessels. Admiral Martin broke off the pursuit and returned west. The English squadron was taking on water and carrying out repairs. Admiral Hotham ordered the boats to be recalled and prepared to sail. During the day, he set sail with twenty-three vessels: five three-deckers, two eighty-deckers, fourteen seventy-fours, and two sixty-fours.

The French squadron was a few leagues south of the Hyères Islands when, on the night of July 11, Admiral Martin was informed by his frigates of the enemy's approach. At daybreak, the English were sighted to the northwest of our force, running on their starboard tacks. There was a strong northwest breeze. The previous night, several English ships had had their sails blown away. Wanting to give them time to replace them, and, on the other hand, wanting to reform his line which was in disorder, Admiral Hotham continued his broadside. After having reconnoitered the strength of the enemy, Admiral Martin headed for the Gulf of Juan, forcing sails.¹⁹⁸

At six o'clock in the morning, the two fleets were underway, tacks to port, the English behind and a little to windward of the French. Admiral Hotham, realizing, a little late, that he had allowed us to gain a large lead, gave the signal to chase ahead. The breeze, which we found weakening as we approached land, remained fresh offshore, and the distance separating us from the English was rapidly diminishing. At noon, our rearguard began to exchange cannonballs with the most advanced vessels. The *Alcide*, exposed to fire from the *Victory*, *Cumberland*, and *Culloden*, suffered greatly. Around one o'clock, this vessel, already very severely de-rigged, was unable to maintain its position. His forward sailor put his main topsail on the mast so as not to stray far, but the number of ships attacking our rearguard was rapidly increasing, so he made sail to avoid being cut off. The frigates, *Justice*, *Sérieuse* and *Alceste*, wanted to save the *Alcide*. One of them, the *Alceste*, excited the admiration of both squadrons. The captain of this frigate, Lieutenant Hébert, maneuvering as calmly as if he had been out of the enemy's presence, positioned himself a short distance ahead of the *Alceste*. After having made the ship standstill, he brought a boat which he sent on board the disabled vessel. The enemy ships, at the sight of this frigate, daring to dispute with them a prey which they already regarded as assured, directed all their shots at it. The captain of the three-decker, the *Victory*, on which flew the flag of Rear-Admiral Robert Mann, went down himself to the batteries, to order the gunners to concentrate their fire on the *Alceste*.¹⁹⁹

The French frigate's boat, hit by a cannonball, disappeared along with its crew. All attempts to save the *Alcide* having become futile, the captain of the *Alceste* had to consider his own safety. As if the God of Armies had extended his hand over the brave men manning this frigate, it remained unharmed by the enemy's fire. After repairing a few minor damages, it covered itself with sails and sailed away. Around a quarter past two, a fire broke out in the *Alcide's* foremast. The fire spread with great rapidity, and soon the ship was ablaze. The English boats had already saved three hundred men when an explosion was heard. The *Alcide* exploded with the rest of its crew. Admiral Hotham, on the *Britannia*, was far from the fighting ships. He had no idea of the situation; on the other hand, he feared that his advance guard would come too close to land in pursuit of us. A little before three o'clock, he gave the order to cease fire and recalled the advanced vessels. The winds, which had been northwesterly in the morning, had shifted to southeasterly, and by midday had settled to the east. Unable to reach the Gulf of Juan, the admiral headed for the Bay of Fréjus, which he reached in the evening. The necessary arrangements were immediately made to present a broadside to the enemy if they attacked us at anchor.

In his account of the events of the day of July 12, Admiral Martin reported, as follows, the catastrophe which befell the *Alcide*. "It was noticed, at one and a quarter past one, that the *Alcide* was on fire in her forward part. The frigate *Alceste* had left her. The enemy even seemed to be moving away from her."²⁰⁰

From then on, I lost hope of rescuing him and thought only of reaching the anchorage at Fréjus with the fleet, which did not appear to have suffered much. At 3:30, the *Alcide*, with its flag and pennant flying, exploded and disappeared. English reports say that the *Alcide* lowered her flag around two o'clock. The *Cumberland*, which was fighting her at that moment, did not stop to rein her in. She continued on her way to join the ships that were harassing our rearguard. There was no reason to fear that the French ship would escape, since she was in the middle of the English fleet. Indeed, nine enemy ships preceded her and fourteen were behind her. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the *Alcide* surrendered. On the other hand, would the English have sent boats to rescue the crew of the French vessel if it had not indicated that it was renouncing its combatant role? There is therefore some reason to believe that the admiral was mistaken in saying that the *Alcide* had disappeared with its pennant and flag. We do not claim that the commander of the French squadron deliberately made this error. However, there is one observation that we must make. In the Ocean as in the Mediterranean, when an unfortunate event occurred, everyone tried to conceal the share of responsibility that fell to them. The admirals, as well as the representatives, did not want to compromise themselves. The Committee of Public Safety played the same role with regard to the nation. It might have been very painful for Admiral Martin to admit that the inferiority of his squadron had made it his duty to abandon the *Alcide*. But, if that were the truth, it had to be said.²⁰¹

There was no other way to enlighten public opinion and persuade the government to change the direction it was giving the navy.

We should have considered ourselves fortunate to have lost only one ship in this unfortunate sortie. With more enterprising opponents, the day of July 13th would have had more serious consequences for us. At daybreak, the English were close to us and to windward. Instead of attacking us immediately, Admiral Hotham lost precious time, either to reform his line or to give some ships time to replace sails taken away during the night. After this first error, he committed a second, no less serious one, by giving the order, at three o'clock in the afternoon, to cease combat. At this moment, we were four leagues from the anchorage. The most advanced English ships, if they had not been stopped by the signals hoisted on the *Britannia* and repeated by the *Victory*, would certainly have succeeded in dismounting several vessels of our rearguard. The latter would not have maintained their positions, which would have placed the commander of the French squadron in the alternative of abandoning them or engaging in a general battle. Admiral Hotham can therefore justly be reproached for having let slip twice, in the same day, the opportunity to fight seventeen vessels with twenty-three. The English had, in addition to this numerical superiority, the very great advantage of possessing five three-deckers, while we had only one vessel of this rank. A few days after this engagement the English returned to Saint-Florent and the French returned to Toulon. When we arrived at this port, we had fourteen hundred sick people.²⁰²

At the beginning of August, Admiral Hotham appeared off Cape Sepet with twenty-three vessels. After ascertaining that the French squadron was at anchor, he headed east. Commodore Nelson, with the *Agamemnon*, some frigates, and corvettes, was sent to cruise along the coast of Italy. His division was to support the operations of the Austrians and Sardinians against the French troops.²⁰³

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BOOK VI

Situation of the Brest squadron. - Rear-Admiral Vence is sent on a cruise with three vessels to protect our coastal shipping movements on the ocean coast. - Driven out by superior forces, he anchors at Belle-Île. - Admiral Villaret comes to his aid with nine vessels. - The two admirals link up off the Penmarcks. - Admiral Villaret pursues an enemy division of five vessels. - After an unsuccessful engagement with the English rearguard, the French squadron heads back to Brest. - It encounters a gale that pushes it out to sea. - Driven out by Lord Bridport, Admiral Villaret heads for the island of *Groix*. Battle of June 23. - We lose the *Tigre*, *Alexandre*, and *Formidable*. - Lord Bridport's circumspection. - Complaints filed by Admiral Villaret against some of his captains. - Judgment rendered by a court martial sitting in Lorient. - Situation of the Toulon squadron. - Departure of Richery's division. - This division seizes, on the coast of Spain, a ship, *Censeur*, and thirty merchant vessels. - Departure of Ganteaume's division, sent on a cruise to the Archipelago. - New system of warfare adopted by the Committee of Public Safety. - Law of Brumaire, Year IV. - End of the conventional regime.

I

The deep winter cruise had dealt a fatal blow to the squadron commanded by Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse. A few months after Rear-Admiral Renaudin's departure for Toulon, we had only twelve ships in Brest harbor that were capable of putting to sea. And it should be added that most of these ships had twin masts and rigging in poor condition. The crews could not be completed.²⁰⁴

In the first days of May 1795, Rear Admiral Vence set out with the seventy-four gun: *Nestor*, under Captain Monnier, on which he had his flag, the *Fougueux*, under Captain Giot-Labrier, and the *Zélé*, under Captain Aved-Magnac. This division was to protect our commerce on the ocean coast. On June 8, Admiral Vence was heading for Brest with a convoy coming from the Bordeaux River, when, off the Penmarcks, his frigates signaled five vessels. It was an English squadron, under the command of Vice-Admiral Cornwallis. This flag officer had left Spithead on May 30 to cruise off Ushant. After ascertaining the enemy's strength, Admiral Vence steered to Belle-Ile, and in the evening he anchored in the harbor of Le Palais. Eight ships of the convoy fell into English hands. The next day, Admiral Cornwallis headed north, with his prizes in tow. On the 11th, being south of the Scilly Isles, he sent them to England, under the command of one of his ships. The English admiral then returned south, with the intention of searching for the three vessels he had chased away on June 8. When it was learned at Brest that Admiral Vence, pursued by superior forces, had been forced to withdraw to Belle-Ile, the representatives decided that the squadron would go to his aid.

On June 11, Admiral Villaret, with the representative Topsent on board, set sail with the ships *Peuple*, one hundred and twenty strong, *Redoutable*, *Alexandre*, *Droits-de-l'Homme*, *Formidable*, *Jean-Bart*, *Mucius*, *Wattignies* and *Tigre*, seventy-four strong. On the 16th, a few leagues from the island of Groix, Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse linked up with Admiral Vence. The latter, no longer seeing the English, had decided to head for Brest.²⁰⁵

A few hours later, our frigates reported five vessels to windward of the army. At that moment, a light westerly breeze was blowing. We were in the presence of Vice-Admiral Cornwallis's squadron. This consisted of the *Royal Sovereign*, a hundred and twenty-strong ship, *Bellerophon*, *Brunswick*, *Triumph*, and *Mars*, a seventy-four-strong ship. The English, after recognizing us, took chase on the starboard tack. The *Bellerophon* and the *Brunswick*, realizing that they were delaying the progress of their squadron, threw their anchors, boats, and some of their water into the sea. The *Bellerophon* also got rid of several carronades, their gun carriages and a large quantity of cannonballs. No particular incident occurred until the end of the day. During the night the winds shifted to the northwest. On the 17th, at sunrise, the two squadrons were running close-hauled, their tacks to starboard. We had the advantage of the wind over our adversaries. The enemy formed a regular and very close line. The French ships were not observing any order. The best of the ships had closed up on the enemy, but the bulk of the squadron was behind and very far away. In these conditions, our efforts had to be aimed at disabling the tail-end ships of the English line. These, remaining behind their squadron, could not fail to fall into our hands. If Admiral Cornwallis let the ship go to their aid, he would delay the march of his division and give Admiral Villaret time to arrive on the battlefield with all his forces. At nine o'clock in the morning, the *Zélé* began firing on the *Mars*. The *Tigre*, *Droits-de-l'Homme*, *Formidable* and *Jean-Bart*, arriving shortly after, attacked the *Mars*, *Triumph* and *Bellerophon*.²⁰⁶

The captain of the frigate *Virginie*, Lieutenant Bergeret, maneuvered with as much skill as audacity. From the very beginning of the action, he positioned himself on the leeward quarter of the *Mars*, and, swerving, he fired volleys at her. It is very fortunate, says an English historian, for the *Mars* and the *Triumph*, and one might add for the entire English squadron, for Admiral Cornwallis would not have abandoned any of his ships, that the captains of the most advanced vessels in the French fleet were not all Bergerets [rustics/shepherds]. Admiral Cornwallis having signaled the *Bellerophon* to pass forward, the enemy line was formed as follows: *Brunswick*, *Bellerophon*, *Royal Sovereign*, *Triumph* and *Mars*. The *Mars*, which had had its maneuvers cut and its sails torn, fell to leeward. The *Royal Sovereign* made an approach and opened fire with its three batteries on our advanced vessels. These held the wind, and the rearguard of the English line, after repairing some damage, resumed its position in the waters of its forward sailor. Until then, the French squadron had gained no advantage.

Of all the ships that had fought, *Tigre* and *Droits-de-l'Homme* were those that had suffered the most. The *Formidable*, a less capable sailing ship, had not been able to stay as close to the enemy as these two vessels. As for the *Zélé*, which was making very good progress, it had positioned itself, around ten o'clock, that is to say after an engagement of one hour, behind the *Formidable*. To maintain this position, it had had to put its topgallant on the mast several times. At six o'clock in the evening, the *Zélé* decided to make sail. Followed by the *Jean-Bart*, it approached the enemy. A change in the direction of the breeze facilitated this maneuver.²⁰⁷

It seemed, at this moment, that the French were able to surround the last ships of the English division. We had, to windward, *Zélé*, *Formidable* and *Jean-Bart*, and, to leeward, *Tigre*, *Droits-de-l'Homme* and *Virginie*. Unfortunately, the *Tigre* and the *Droits-de-l'Homme* had mast damage that no longer allowed them to follow the enemy. Moreover, our line was lengthening. The *Peuple* and the *Alexandre* were out of sight; the *Redoutable* was beginning to disappear over the horizon. Several ships, although positioned forward of the *Redoutable*, were still very far away. If the English, which was bound to happen, took several wrong turns during the night, it would be impossible for our ships to rejoin. Now, according to information received by Admiral Villaret, there was an enemy squadron at sea in the vicinity of where we were, consisting of fifteen to twenty ships, under the command of Lord Bridport. Finally, we had left Brest with fifteen days' worth of provisions and six days had passed since our departure. In these circumstances, Villaret judged that retreat was necessary. The order was given to cease fire.

Since *Le Peuple* was making very poor progress, Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse had set his flag on the frigate *La Fraternité*. The *Redoutable* and the *Nestor*, on which Rear-Admirals Vence and Kerguelen were, had been unable, due to their distance, to take part in the battle. It is to be regretted that among the vessels engaged there was not one bearing the flag of a general officer. The attack would probably have been conducted with more unity.²⁰⁸

In any case, if the *Zélé*, as the admiral said in his report, had not done its duty, several ships, among which we must mention the *Tigre*, *Formidable*, and *Droits-de-l'Homme*, had fought vigorously. What results had we achieved after this long cannonade? There were thirteen wounded on the *Mars*, the rearguard of the English line. As for the *Triumph*, long exposed to our fire, it had suffered no losses. One might think that, concerned with delaying the English advance, we had mainly intended to disarm the ships we were fighting. Admitting that this plan had been ours, we had not been successful in its execution. The damage to the *Mars* and the *Triumph* was of no consequence. What is clear from the foregoing is the complete and absolute impotence of our artillery. Vice-Admiral Cornwallis's retreat was regarded in England as an extremely remarkable feat of war. Both chambers voted thanks to the fortunate admiral. This general officer had shown, on June 13, decision and composure. Judging by his maneuver, he was determined not to abandon any of his ships. But it may be added that, given the weakness of our attack, it did not take much energy for him to persist in his attitude.

After raising the chase, Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse forced sail to reach Brest. Upon landing, a very violent northeasterly gale drove him out to sea. On the 22nd, at daybreak, ships were sighted in the northwest. At that moment, we were making our way, without orders, over land with a light southeast breeze. The frigate *Virginie*, charged with reconnoitering the ships in sight, reported seventeen vessels. The squadron, in whose presence we found ourselves, had left Spithead on June 12, under the command of Lord Bridport.²⁰⁹

It consisted of fourteen vessels, eight three-deckers, one eighty-gun, and five seventy-four-gun. Lord Bridport had received orders to escort the ships that the English government was sending to Quiberon Bay. Commodore Sir John Borlase Warren was charged with the specific direction of this operation. He had, under his command, in addition to the frigate *Inconstant*, which he was riding, the seventy-four-gun ships *Robert* and *Thunderer*, the sixty-four-gun ship *Standard*, and fifty transport vessels. The expeditionary fleet had arrived on the 9th, in sight of Belle-Île. The weather being very fine and the breeze blowing from the west, Lord Bridport had allowed the commodore to continue his journey. As for himself, he had established himself on a cruise along the coast in order to watch the Brest squadron. On the very day that Lord Bridport had left, Sir John Borlase Warren's reconnaissance vessels had sighted Admiral Villaret's ships. The commodore had immediately sent a fast-moving aviso to Admiral Bridport to inform him of this news, and he himself had set out to search for the English squadron in order to place himself under its protection. Such was the situation at the moment when the two squadrons came face to face. Admiral Villaret, Major Bruix of the squadron and Representative Topsent went over to the frigate *La Proserpine*. Rear Admirals Vence and Kerguelen raised their flags, the former on the *Fraternité* and the latter on the *Dryade*. The frigates were ordered to send part of their crews aboard the ships of the Vence division, which were missing many men.²¹⁰

The French admiral, concerned with ensuring the rallying of his squadron, signaled the line of battle, tacks to starboard, forming up on the slowest-moving ship, the *Alexandre*. He gave the order to put up sail. Captain Guillemet of the *Alexandre* did not understand what the admiral wanted. Instead of keeping to the wind, he let the ship bear away to join the ships that were to leeward of his ship. The English were running close-hauled, tacks to starboard. Lord Bridport, noticing that we were maneuvering to avoid any encounter, which, moreover, our numerical inferiority forced us to do, signaled his army to chase forward. During the day, the breeze, passing to the west, gave our adversaries the advantage of the wind. The *Alexandre* and the *Redoutable*, which were behind, were taken in tow by the frigates *La Régénérée* and *La Virginie*. Some English vessels were quickly gaining on us, and Admiral Villaret conceived serious concerns for the rearguard. Wanting all his ships to have the possibility of presenting the beam to the enemy, he signaled "to pass from the marching order, on the closest starboard line, to the abreast order on the perpendicular of the wind, the vessels steering to the east-northeast." "This very simple movement," said the admiral in his report, "had the advantage, without delaying our march, of putting us in a position which allowed us all to present the beam to the enemy at the same time, on one side or the other; but this order was not formed, despite the particular signals that I made, despite the verbal orders which prescribed to each ship what it had to do." At sunset, calm came. Around one o'clock in the morning, a light southerly breeze arose which our adversaries received first.²¹¹

By daybreak, the English, who had continued to chase ahead, formed a very long line. The most advanced ships, including the three-decker *Queen Charlotte*, were less than three miles from the *Alexandre*.

The French squadron was without orders. Despite the very precise instructions from the commander-in-chief, transmitted during the night by the frigates, most of the ships had not adjusted their speed to that of the worst-moving ships. The army was warned that the admiral was going to seek the anchorage at Groix where he would drop a large anchor with a swagon to present the enemy with a starboard tack. The admiral again ordered all the ships to adjust their speed to that of the worst-moving ships. Finally, he gave the signal to form the marching order, on the closest starboard line, the course to the east-northeast. "If this order had been carried out," the admiral wrote later, "the enemy vanguard would never have been able or even dared to attack us. The insubordination of several captains and the extreme ignorance of some others rendered all our measures null and void; the signals, the orders over the loudspeaker, everything was useless. The heart of Representative Topsent and mine were grieved by the misfortune that we foresaw from that moment." The frigate *La Régénérée* again took the *Alexandre* in tow. As the enemy ships were rapidly approaching this vessel, Admiral Villaret ordered the army to bear away. Only three vessels, *Peuple*, *Redoutable* and *Tigre*, complied with the orders of the commander-in-chief. Around one o'clock in the morning, the *Alexander* and the ship preceding it in the line, the *Mucius*, opened fire on the English with their retreating guns.²¹²

Shortly after, the *Alexandre* was attacked by two seventy-four-gun ships, the *Irresistible* and the *Orion*. The frigate *La Régénérée*, about to be surrounded, cast off the tow. The *Mucius* covered itself with canvas and moved away. Admiral Villaret then signaled "to form a speed line of battle on the *Alexandre* without regard for positions." The captains of the *Tigre* and the *Formidable* were the only ones who executed this movement. The *Queen Charlotte*, overtaking the *Alexandre*, attacked the *Formidable*. The English three-decker was joined by an eighty-gun ship, the *Sans-Pareil*. The French ship was sustaining this unequal combat with the greatest courage when fire broke out on its quarterdeck. As the fire spread very rapidly, the *Formidable*, which no longer had any help to expect from its squadron, lowered its flag. The *Queen Charlotte* then joined the two ships, the *Orion* and the *Irrésistible*, against which the *Alexandre* was fighting. The situation of this ship seemed desperate. Admiral Villaret, as if he wanted to make a last effort to save it, signaled to form a very close line of battle to free the surrounded ship. This signal was completely ignored. The *Alexandre*, sinking, with some of its guns dismounted and a large number of men out of action, suffered the same fate as the *Formidable*.

After the surrender of the latter vessel, the *Sans-Pareil* moved towards the *Tigre*, which had become the rearguard of the French line. The *Tigre* was responding vigorously to the fire of the English ship when two hundred-gun vessels, the *Queen* and the *London*, came to attack it. The admiral signaled the army to lay up and the *Zélé* to take the *Tigre* in tow.²¹³

These orders were not carried out. The *Tigre* had arrived about a mile west of Groix Point when a cannonball severed its rudder stock. Exhausted by several hours of fighting, with no hope of escape, it lowered its flag. The *Peuple*, *Mucius*, *Redoutable*, *Droits-de-l'Homme*, and *Nestor* continued on their way, exchanging cannonballs with the pursuing vessels. The *Zélé*, *Fougueux*, *Jean-Bart*, and *Wattignies*, which were at the head of the fleet and far behind, took no part in this cannonade. Around nine o'clock, Lord Bridport gave the order to cease firing.

Admiral Villaret had planned to anchor off the island of Groix. He intended to position himself to receive the enemy's attack at anchor. With the squadron reduced to nine vessels, he wondered whether he would be able to resist Lord Bridport's superior forces. The information provided by the fishermen having given him the certainty that the island was defenseless, he called the general officers on board. After examining the situation, the council declared that the squadron would only be safe in the port of Lorient. Admiral Villaret was wrongly concerned with Lord Bridport's plans. The latter had no intention of attacking us. It must be recognized that his extreme circumspection saved the remains of our squadron. If he had followed us, our vessels would have been captured or forced to throw themselves ashore. During the day, the English headed out to sea with their prizes in tow. The opinion expressed by Admirals Villaret, Vence and Kerguelen having been adopted by Representative Topsent, the squadron entered Lorient.²¹⁴

The vessels under the command of Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse were, for the most part, in poor condition. Damage sustained in the battle of June 1, 1794, or during the long winter cruise, had not been repaired. The crews were not only incomplete but also completely inadequate in terms of quality. The number of professional sailors was well below what was necessary, and we had no gunners. "All our shots," the admiral wrote, "landed in the water." Finally, with a few honorable exceptions, the general staffs had no military training. As a result, the squadron was unable to execute the maneuvers that a skilled general might resort to in the presence of a numerically superior enemy. These points established, let us examine the various incidents of the battle of the island of Groix. On June 23, at six o'clock in the morning, the last ship of the line, the *Alexandre*, which was making very little progress, was attacked by the *Orion* and the *Irresistible*, of seventy-four guns. There were, not far from these two ships, five ships, three of which had one hundred guns. At the same time, a three-decker ship, the *Queen Charlotte*, was not behind the *Alexandre* but ahead of it. We have just indicated the position of eight ships out of the fourteen which made up the English squadron. The other six followed the first at a short distance. The commander of the French squadron could only free the *Alexandre* by going to its aid with all his ships. This maneuver, as a result of the enemy's position, led to a general affair. Admiral Villaret backed down in the face of this determination. However, some time later he signaled to form a very close line of battle to go to the aid of the engaged vessel.²¹⁵

Now, at that moment, according to his own words, the *Alexandre* was cut off and completely disabled by fire from three ships, two of which were three-deckers. It was unreasonable to believe that we would save the *Alexandre*.

The admiral wanted to prevent the *Tigre* from falling into enemy hands, but when he formed this plan, the ship was on the verge of succumbing. He ordered the army to lay up and the *Zélé* to give the disabled vessel a tow. We do not intend to lessen the seriousness of the fault committed by the captains who did not obey the signals of the squadron leader. The captain of the *Zélé* failed in his duty by not attempting to steer the *Tigre* out of the fire, since he had received the order to do so. But it is evident that he could not carry out his mission. The *Tigre* was fighting against three vessels, one of eighty guns, the *Sans-Pareil*, and two of one hundred guns, the *London* and the *Queen*. Several vessels, among them the *Royal George*, bearing the flag of Lord Bridport, were already ahead of her. In these conditions, the captain of the *Zélé*, even if he had been an excellent officer and assuming his ship to be in very good condition, would have had no chance of carrying out this enterprise. When we examine the situation of the two squadrons at six o'clock in the morning on June 23, we are led to think that the abandonment of the *Alexandre* was dictated by circumstances. Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse maneuvered at first as if he were resigning himself to this sacrifice, then he seemed to reconsider this determination. From this moment on, there exists, between the orders he gives and the goal he sets for himself, a continual contradiction. In reality, he abandons the *Alexandre*, but he does not want this to be said.²¹⁶

The loss of the *Formidable* and the *Tigre*, whose captains strictly complied with his orders, was the consequence of this conduct. It seems that the admiral's main goal was to absolve himself and the delegate of the Convention of responsibility. The report, in which the admiral informed the Commissioner of the Navy and Colonies of the various events of the battle of the Isle of Groix, is written in the same spirit.

The defense of the three vessels captured by the English had been heroic. But it was not enough to fight vigorously; the enemy had to be harmed. What losses had we inflicted on Lord Bridport's squadron? The English ships, *Queen Charlotte*, *London* and *Royal George*, each of one hundred guns, *Sans-Pareil*, of eighty guns, *Colossus*, *Russel*, *Orion* and *Irresistible*, of seventy-four guns, had fired cannons on June 23. The total number of killed and wounded in these eight ships was one hundred and forty-four men. According to English reports, the three captured ships had six hundred and seventy men out of action, namely: the *Alexandre* one hundred and thirty, the *Formidable* two hundred and twenty and the *Tigre* three hundred and twenty. On the other hand, the nine French vessels, which had barely fought, had 222 men out of action, distributed as follows: the *Droits-de-l'Homme* forty, the *Fougueux* five, the *Wattignies* three, the *Peuple* sixty, the *Redoutable* sixty, the *Nestor* twenty-six, the *Jean-Bart* twenty-three and the *Zélé* five. The *Mucius* had not had a single man hit by enemy fire. The various incidents of the battle of the island of Groix clearly highlighted the error that the Convention had committed, in deciding, on the proposal of Jean-Bon-Saint-André, that the general officers, commander-in-chief and subordinates, would transfer to frigates at the time of the battle.²¹⁷

If Admirals Villaret, Vence, and Kerguelen had remained aboard their ships, the retreat would have been better conducted. Admiral Villaret, dissatisfied with the others, and perhaps also with himself, reduced to commanding a few dilapidated vessels, asked to be replaced in his command. He was ready, he told the minister, to serve as subordinates if the Republic needed him, and he gave his word of honor that he would preach by example and the most passive submission.

The Convention had to be informed of the events that had occurred from the day our squadron left Brest until the moment it anchored off the island of Groix. The representative Doulcet, charged with this mission, although he belonged to the fraction of the Convention which had triumphed at Thermidor, used, in speaking of naval affairs, the same methods as Barère and Jean-Bon-Saint-André. It was the same tune, with very slight variations in which the interest of the navy had no part. When Barère and Jean-Bon-Saint-André had some bad news to tell the Convention, they began with a vigorous attack directed against the monarchical government which they accused of having disorganized the navy. After which, both found themselves in good standing with the nation and excused from speaking of the conduct of the representatives on mission to our fleets or of the measures taken by the Committee of Public Safety. This time, the anathema, reserved until then for the government of Louis XVI, was launched, with no less vigor, against the vanquished of Thermidor.²¹⁸

The grand words of cowardice and treason were enough, as in the past, to explain everything. The speaker, faithful to tradition, while informing the Convention of the unfavorable outcome of this sortie, maintained intact the government's rights to national recognition. The arrangements were well made and the goal pursued was excellent. If the personnel had done their duty, the efforts of the Committee of Public Safety would have been met with the greatest success.

The Convention listened without batting an eyelid and without repeating a word of Representative Doulcet's speech. Whether through ignorance of naval affairs, or because this assembly had not yet, in July 1795, shaken off the yoke of harsh discipline to which the reign of terror had subjected it, no voice was raised to protest against this language. No one asked what the delegates of the Committee of Public Safety were doing on our fleets and what measures had been taken, since the return of our squadron, after the fatal cruise of the great winter, for the training of the crews and the repair of the hulls, masts and sails. What was the meaning, moreover, of this last sortie, made on the orders of the representatives on mission to Brest, to free the three ships of Rear-Admiral Vence anchored off Belle-Ile? Did they not know that this division, by choosing a favorable moment, could easily reach one of our ports? What proved it was the junction made at sea between the squadron that left Brest and this division. Why then needlessly compromise the few ships that remained to us? There were constant complaints about the officers, but the current government had been in power since the end of July 1794.²¹⁹

Had he tried to change a state of affairs that he himself denounced and to which he attributed our setbacks?

We have said that Admiral Villaret had complained very severely about some of his captains. The latter responded to the accusations leveled against them by publicly criticizing their commander's conduct. This was how things had happened after the battle of June 1, 1794. There was no reason to be surprised that events of this nature should occur in an officer corps that had neither tradition nor homogeneity. These attempts, moreover, had no chance of success. Villaret's position in Paris was very solid. The admiral had lived on very good terms with the terrorists, and his relations with their successors were excellent. Shortly after his arrival in Lorient, the minister assured him that he had the government's full confidence. "Continue," the minister wrote to Villaret, "to serve the Republic, count on its gratitude, and trample on intrigues and schemers." However, it was essential that light be shed on the events of this campaign. Three vessels remained in enemy hands, and it was unclear whether sufficient efforts had been made to free them. Had this been a case of force majeure? Did the commander-in-chief have some faults to reproach himself with, or was this result due to the mistakes of a few captains? These were the questions that had to be resolved to satisfy the general feeling.²²⁰

After consulting the Committee of Public Safety, Representative Topsent ordered the formation of a military jury to examine the conduct of the captains of the *Zélé*, *Fougueux*, *Jean-Bart*, *Mucius*, *Wattignies*, and *Droits-de-l'Homme*, as well as Lieutenant Beaulon, who had replaced Captain Legouardun of the *Jean-Bart*, who had been wounded during the battle. These officers were accused of cowardice or disobedience in the incidents that had taken place on June 17 and 23 between the Republic's squadron and the English army. The jury, chaired by Captain Molini, Major General, was composed of Captains Boissauveur, Lebrun, Maïstral, Leroy and Lieutenants Marphy, Rolland and L'Hermitte. After holding several sessions, the jury delivered its verdict. By a majority of six votes out of seven, the captain of the *Zélé* was declared guilty on June 17, guilty but excusable on the 23rd. Five votes out of seven recognized the guilt of Captain Giot-Labrier on June 23. Captains Larréguy and Domat, although convicted of the act with which they were charged, were not considered criminals. As for Captains Legouardun and Sébire and Lieutenant Beaulon, the jury declared that they were not guilty. The defendants then appeared before a court martial, composed of Rear Admirals Vaultier, Bouvet François, Nielly and Captains Mallès, Gourio, Puren, Deniau, Vignot, Longer, Bailliard and Legrand. The captain of the *Zélé* was dismissed, declared unfit for service and sentenced to six months in prison at Fort la Loi in Brest. The captain of the *Fougueux* was dismissed and declared unfit for service. Captains Legouardun and Sébire, of the *Jean-Bart* and the *Droits-de-l'Homme*, as well as Lieutenant Beaulon were acquitted of the charges brought against them.²²¹

This judgment was rendered on August 21, 1795. The Committee of Public Safety dismissed the captains of the *Mucius* and the *Wattignies*, although the jury had admitted their innocence. Captains Legouardun and Sébire were retained in their commands. The decision concerning them was to be read in the presence of the assembled officers of the squadron and the port. The judgment rendered against the captain of the *Zélé*, submitted in 1799 to a board of review, was overturned for a procedural defect and misapplication of the law. The minister instructed the commander of the arms in Brest to convene a jury before which the former captain of the *Zélé* was to appear. He also invited him to request documents relating to this affair directly from Lorient. The searches carried out in that port resulted in the discovery of only insignificant documents. Time passed, and the captain of the *Zélé* was not brought to trial.

II

Since the engagement of July 14, 1795, Admiral Martin's squadron had not returned to sea. It had lost almost all of its sailors to desertion. They were poorly fed, barely clothed, and discouraged by continual failures. They had only one thought: to flee naval service. The number of sick was considerable. By September, ten thousand men would have been needed to complete the complement of the ships anchored in Toulon harbor.²²²

The minister ordered the preparation of two divisions in this port, comprising seven ships, six frigates, and two corvettes. It was with the greatest difficulty that they managed to provide these ships with the provisions and equipment they needed. To complete the crews, most of the ships in the harbor were disarmed.

On September 14, Captain Richery, appointed to command the larger of these two divisions, set sail with the eighty-ship *Victoire*, *Jupiter*, *Barras*, *Berwick*, *Révolution*, and the seventy-four-ship *Duquesne*. Admiral Hotham learned on September 22, while anchored in the Gulf of Saint-Florent, in the north of Corsica, that six French vessels had put to sea. He was in no hurry to detach a division of his army in pursuit of them. It was only on October 5 that Rear-Admiral Robert Mann, charged with this mission, set sail with six vessels, one with three decks and five with seventy-fours. Commander Richery headed for the strait, which he had the good fortune to cross without seeing the enemy. His instructions prescribed him to destroy the establishments of Great Britain on the coasts of New England and Newfoundland. On October 7, the French division was fifty leagues west of Cape Saint-Vincent. That day, she chased away a convoy that was heading for England, under the escort of the seventy-four gun ships, *Fortitude*, *Bedford* and *Censeur* and some frigates. After a short engagement, the *Censeur* lowered its flag. This ship had been captured by the English, at the battle of Cape Noli, on March 14, 1795.²²³

The *Fortitude*, the *Bedfort*, and the frigates could not be reached. This was not the case with the convoy. Of the thirty-one ships it comprised, only one escaped. On October 13, Commander Richery entered Cadiz with his prizes.

We have mentioned that the port of Toulon had received orders to arm two divisions, using the resources of the arsenal and those that Admiral Martin's squadron, almost completely disarmed, could offer. The first of these divisions was that of Commander Richery. The second, comprising the seventy-four-ship *Républicain* and the frigates *Justice*, *Junon*, and *Artémise*, was under the command of Captain Ganteaume. He was to cruise the archipelago in order to intercept enemy trade there. This division set sail from Toulon on October 10. At the same time, a division of frigates under the command of Captain Moultonson captured eighteen heavily laden vessels off Cape Finistère, part of a convoy heading from Jamaica to England.

After the incident at the Isle of Groix and the encounter in the Mediterranean between Admiral Martin's squadron and British forces, Paris seemed to realize the bad path the navy had long been on. There took place in the councils of the government a complete change in the line of conduct which should be followed in order to continue the struggle with Great Britain. The destruction of enemy commerce became our sole objective. The Committee of Public Safety, severely condemning what had been done until then, resolved to substitute privateering for squadron warfare.²²⁴

One of the members of the Committee was tasked with presenting the government's new plans to the Convention. The representative entrusted with this mission said that the Committee was making every effort to repair the damage that the Reign of Terror and the ignorant or traitorous agents it employed had done to the navy. He affirmed that the Committee would succeed in regenerating—the word of the time—this important part of the national forces. The government had already turned its attention to the arsenals. It had found them in the most distressing state, but our resources were great and everything suggested that this situation would be quickly improved. The government, said the speaker, had surrounded itself with a capable administration, with educated and experienced general officers. The officers who, patriots since the Revolution, distinguished by their talents, had only been dismissed and imprisoned as a result of the disorganizing system that had reigned for too long, were being recalled to service. These officers, tried by misfortune, returned with the desire to contribute to the maritime triumphs of the Republic. The Convention learned that henceforth our only goal would be to destroy the enemy's trade and wreak havoc in its colonies. It was thus, added the speaker, who seemed to doubt nothing, "that we will force the English into a shameful bankruptcy, a worthy end to a proud and despotic government."

This language was no different from that which the Convention had been hearing for several years. Jean-Bon-Saint-André, too, had announced the regeneration of the navy and the defeat of England.²²⁵

We know what became of these promises. In any case, the speaker's frivolity, his presumption, the casualness with which he spoke of past disasters, his assurance about the successes reserved for the new system of warfare, did not raise a murmur on the benches of the assembly. No one seemed surprised that the government was so publicly displaying its plans. The Convention, always docile, approved the proposals submitted to it. It voted for the provisions requested by the speaker to promote privateering. Thus, the ruin of English commerce by privateers and light divisions became the task imposed on the Navy Department. When the captures made by the vessels under the command of Captains Richery and Moulton became known, the Committee of Public Safety considered itself to have achieved its intended goal. The representative, charged with bringing these events to the attention of the Convention, presented them as the consequence of the new system of war and a pledge of our future successes. He was under great illusions. The events of which he spoke could not have had this significance. We had waged squadron warfare too early and we were waging privateering too late. In the first case, proof was no longer required; as for the second, the future would provide the demonstration. As a result of the errors committed since the beginning of the Revolution, our maritime establishment was destroyed. Such was the truth and, in the month of October 1795, it was not by vain speeches that this situation could seriously be changed.²²⁶

III

The ordinances promulgated in 1786, under the ministry of Marshal de Castries, governed the navy at the outbreak of the Revolution. The Constituent Assembly amended them on September 21, 1791. Throughout the duration of the conventional regime, laws and regulations disappeared. It can also be said that during this period there were no ministers. Monge, Dalbarade, and Redon exercised no influence over the affairs of their departments. In the ports, civil servants, regardless of their rank, found themselves in the same situation. All matters were decided supremely by the orders of the representatives on mission, the decisions of the Committee of Public Safety, and the decrees of the Convention. The result was the most complete confusion in the conduct of affairs. The complaints that arose in the ports were so severe that it was necessary to try to remedy the problem. The naval committee, with a consultative commission placed under its command, prepared the reorganization of the various naval services. On October 24 and 25, the Convention voted on the bills forming the whole of the new legislation. The naval artillery troops, abolished on January 30, 1794, on the proposal of Jean-Bon-Saint-André, were reestablished. The new corps, whose strength could, in time of war, rise to twenty-five thousand men, was intended for the defense of ports and coasts.²²⁷

It was also responsible for artillery service on board ships of the Republic, concurrently and equally, it was stated in the law, with the naval gunners. Four hundred and eighty men, drawn from the naval enlistment, were distributed among the ports and placed under the authority of the artillery directors. These sailors were to be returned to their quarters after spending a year in the gunnery schools. This was a far cry from the prompt and energetic measures that would have been necessary to immediately provide our fleet with gun commanders capable of fighting the English gunners.

The law on the organization of the fleet staff reflected the spirit of the times. It wiped out what already existed. The Convention declared the officer corps dissolved. The new formation included eight vice-admirals, sixteen rear-admirals, fifty division chiefs, one hundred ship captains, one hundred and eighty frigate captains and four hundred ship lieutenants. There were, in addition, two hundred midshipmen divided into two classes. Young men meeting certain sailing qualifications, who successfully passed an examination on subjects determined by the regulations, were appointed midshipmen. Conforming to the spirit which had prevailed until then, the Convention decided that the midshipmen would not belong permanently to the military navy. After a certain time embarking on state vessels, these young men were dismissed from the service. The law prescribed the appointment, before December 21, 1795, of five vice-admirals, eight rear-admirals, forty division chiefs, eighty ship captains and one hundred and forty frigate captains.²²⁸

By June 19, 1796, the cadre had to be complete. A very wise provision allowed for the recall of officers of all ranks and midshipmen who were not currently employed. Both could apply for the new training, according to their rank and the rank they held on the list on the day they left the service. In short, the schools were not reestablished. Not only did the Convention not believe in the usefulness of this measure, but it also considered it incompatible with the principles of the new government. However, there was no other way to ensure the recruitment of the fleet staff. Everything therefore boiled down to a new... reorganization, coming after all those that had been decreed since 1793. As this reorganization could only be carried out using existing elements, the value of the personnel law, passed on October 25, had to depend on those who would be responsible for implementing it.

When the Constituent Assembly passed a law on the administration of the arsenals, it had completely sacrificed the military officers. The positions they occupied, under the ordinances of 1786, had been taken away from them. Public favor had, at that time, shifted to the administrators. It was to them that the law had entrusted the superior management of the ports. The Convention found things in this state. This situation must have suited an assembly that professed a particular predilection for civil power. There was therefore reason to believe that the administrators would find solid support in the new regime.²²⁹

But the representatives on mission in the ports were difficult masters to serve. On September 28, 1792, the Convention, on the proposal of the Committee of Public Safety, decided that "the port movements, assigned by the law of October 12, 1791, to the civil officers of the navy, would no longer be part of their duties, and would be carried out, in the future, under the orders of the commanders of the services." The disagreement we have just described worsened. Jean-Bon-Saint-André, dissatisfied with the heads of the civil offices of the navy, whose appearance he did not find sufficiently revolutionary, wanted to diminish their personal position and reduce the extent of their authority. The Committee of Public Safety having approved the ideas of this representative, a decree, drafted along these lines, was presented to the Convention, which adopted it. The principal head of the civil offices of the navy disappeared from the port service. His duties were shared between two new officials, one called maritime agent and the other civil inspector. Both corresponded directly with the minister. The Committee of Public Safety took things further. The Convention decided, on his proposal, "that there could not be, in the same branch of civil administration of a port, nor in all the different branches of which the administration is composed in the same port, more than two individuals of the same family, up to the degree of first cousin inclusive; brothers-in-law and sons-in-law were included in the same arrangement." The administrators, who had long been the favorites of the Revolution, had become, in the words of Jean-Bon-Saint-André, "dangerous men."²³⁰

The laws of October 24 and 25, 1795, did not maintain the provisions adopted in 1794, on the proposal of Jean-Bon-Saint-André.

According to the new legislation, the commander of arms was the sole representative of military officers in ports. He exercised authority over naval officers of all ranks and over artillery troops. He did not have the right to take charge of ships undergoing repairs or fitting out, and his influence over those in harbor was virtually nil. He did not control port movements. This service was placed under the orders of an administrator. The committee responsible for preparing naval laws had deemed it necessary to seek the expertise of specialized experts. To this end, he had called upon a consultative commission. This included four engineers, three naval administrators, four merchant captains, three shipowners, and two ship captains. It is unnecessary to draw attention to the composition of this commission, in which naval officers, that is to say, the truly important element, were barely represented. The spirit which had inspired the authors of the decree of September 21, 1791, was found entirely in the new law. "There is incompatibility," it was stated in one of the articles, "between the functions of the various agents of the administration in the ports and the military functions." The Convention had wanted to tie the hands of the new government and prevent it from entrusting the position of ordonnateur to a naval officer. This assembly had voted on the new maritime legislation on October 24 and 25, 1795. On the 26th it ended its career.²³¹

BOOK VII

Entry into office of the Directory. - Admiral Truguet is appointed Minister of the Navy. - Message from the Directory concerning port administration. - The government requests amendments to the naval laws passed by the Convention. - Rejection of these proposals by the Councils. - The Directory's concern for the colonies. - Ships are sent to the Antilles and India. - Combat between Rear-Admiral Sercey's division and the ships *Arrogant* and *Victorious*. - Reunion, in Brest harbor, of the ships that entered Lorient after the Battle of Groix Island. - Cruise by Commander Ganteaume in the Mediterranean. - Proclamation by Admiral Truguet to the sailors of the West and South. - The French Republic signs a treaty of offensive and defensive alliance with Spain. — Spain declares war on England. — Rear-Admiral Richery's division leaves Cadiz, escorted by a Spanish squadron. — General Bonaparte is placed at the head of the Army of Italy. — Military events that change our situation in the Mediterranean. — British troops evacuate Corsica. — Admiral Don Juan de Langara enters the Mediterranean. — The English squadron withdraws to Gibraltar. — Return of Rear-Admiral Richery's division. Results of the campaign carried out by this general officer on the coasts of North America. — Sir John Jervis anchors off Lisbon with fourteen ships.

I

Upon taking office, the Directory addressed a proclamation to the French people in which it outlined the country's situation. After outlining the difficulties of its task, the new government promised to neglect nothing to ensure peace and national prosperity. Although the Directory had a very strong desire to re-establish order at home, foreign affairs first called its attention. Our armies completed the conquest of Holland. The Stadtholder took refuge in England and the Batavian Republic was proclaimed.²³²

Prussia signed the peace treaty at Basel on April 5, 1795. Spain, alarmed by the progress we were making on its territory, followed suit. On July 22, 1795, the Madrid cabinet concluded a peace treaty with the French Republic. Our military position was improving daily, but the advantages gained were not great enough to lead Europe to lay down its arms. From the point of view of the struggle it was waging against Great Britain, France had gained little. However, we had inflicted a check on that power by depriving it, through our close union with the Batavian Republic, of the foothold it had previously had on the continent.

Admiral Truguet, called to the Ministry of the Navy on November 4, 1795, found himself faced with the maritime organization bequeathed by the Convention. He immediately protested against institutions that did not allow him to fulfill the obligations of his position. He was responsible for sending to sea vessels capable of competing with those of the enemy. This was then, as it is today, the final word on expenditures made for the navy. The Minister demanded that any combination not leading directly to this result be rejected. He considered that it was not possible to achieve it by placing, under the orders of a civil official, the construction, maintenance and refit of vessels, their armament, the manufacture of cables and maneuvers and other objects intended for ships, the direction of port movements and the artillery service. The Directory adopted the Minister's point of view. On December 3, 1795, he sent a message to the Council of Five Hundred on the administration of ports and arsenals.²³³

The Directory spoke, in very severe terms, of the maritime organization that the National Convention had bequeathed to it. This organization, it said, decreed, in the midst of the storms, events, and works of all kinds that had assailed this assembly at the end of its session, "presented nothing but obstacles to the government and chained it in all its means of execution." The Directory proposed to create a general organizer, who could be chosen from any rank, in any civil, military, or administrative profession, but who must have at least ten years of navigation on state vessels. The general manager, who corresponded alone with the Minister of the Navy, had, under his orders, all the heads of the port services.

In the Directory's project, the administration subject to the general manager was divided into two main directorates, one headed by a military officer and the other by a civilian. The military directorate included the officers, troops, police and port guard, the construction, maintenance and refit of vessels, their armament and equipment, the manufacture of cables, maneuvers and other works intended for vessels and the movements of the port. The artillery came under the military directorate. The civil management had, in its attributions, supplies, accounting of the arsenal in days and materials, the armaments office, distribution of catches, reviews of civil and military maintenance, administration and policing of penal colonies and hospitals, accounting, control of funds and inspection of food.²³⁴

The Council of Five Hundred, after hearing the reading of the message, appointed a commission to examine the observations presented by the Directory. It further decided that the execution of existing laws would be suspended. The Council of Ancients approved this resolution. Unfortunately, there were members of the Convention in the Councils who had introduced and passed the laws whose abolition the new government was demanding. These members fought the Directory's ideas with great vigor. The commission appointed by the Council of Five Hundred was openly hostile to the projects submitted to it. The rapporteur pointed out with indignation the tendencies of the government which, forgetting the lessons of the past, wanted to introduce, into the new legislation, the spirit of the ordinances of 1776 and 1786. The creation of a general officer, responsible for military and administrative direction and corresponding alone with the minister, seemed to inspire him with real horror. He said, about this new official: "We should put at his disposal everything that exists in the ports, and give him a power capable of making all the authorities of the maritime cities bend before him: in a word, we would have a tyrant like Louis XIV. The most obeyed monarch and the most formidable despot would have blushed to create him." It was necessary to hasten, added the speaker, to return to the principles laid down by the Constituent Assembly. The decree of September 21, 1791, issued by this assembly, had removed the ordinances of 1776 and 1786, which the rapporteur called "a shapeless mass of incoherent and contradictory ordinances and regulations."²³⁵

He did not deny that the navy had made a brilliant showing at that time, but he claimed that its successes had been achieved "at the expense of economy, the basis of all good administration."

The representatives sent on missions to the ports under the conventional regime had a marked predilection for civil authority. However, seeing things closely and recognizing the errors made in 1791, the delegates of the Committee of Public Safety had touched, very slightly indeed, on some of the rules established by the Constituent Assembly. There was a speaker who attributed the disasters we had suffered at sea to these modifications. He says: "If we have had some lucid interval, if some successes have taught us what we could do, it was when, in 1791, the system of administration was changed; it was when we stopped distracting our sailors with occupations that were foreign to them; it was when we gave back to the civil officers their attributions. But our advantages soon disappeared with this regime, and our catastrophes returned with the Castries system which was not long in being produced. What did fifteen ships of the line do, maintained for so long in the Mediterranean, where the enemy was without force? Nothing. What became of our communication with Genoa and Italy? It is intercepted. What protection did our supply transports obtain? They fell prey to a few miserable Oneille barges. What was our fate in battles? Defeat. What became of our maritime trade? None. What became of Corsica and our colonies? They are invaded. What has been the fate of our naval forces? The decline."²³⁶

What is the situation of our arsenals? Destitution." One searches in vain for the lucid interval and the successes reported by the speaker. One is also very surprised to learn that, during the revolutionary period, the navy had returned to the regime in force under the ministry of Marshal de Castries. Criticism stops before such ignorance. The speakers who spoke in favor of the message were few in number. However, a few members of the Council of Five Hundred skillfully defended the minister's ideas. But nothing could prevail against the prejudices and passions of that time. The guarding of the arsenals, their security, the discipline of the troops, the command of the naval forces—such were the limits assigned to the competence of military officers. Beyond that, everything belonged to civil servants. The Assembly decided on January 19, 1796, that the law of October 25, 1795, concerning maritime organization, would receive its full and complete execution. On January 29, 1796, the Council of Ancients, after very lively debates, in which the conduct of the Directory was judged in very severe terms, approved the decision taken by the other assembly.

The efforts made by the Directory having remained powerless, the Minister of the Navy was obliged to take the necessary measures to apply the new legislation. Dissatisfied with the failure he had experienced, and, on the other hand, using the right conferred on him by the decree on the organization of ports, Admiral Truguet appointed four construction engineers to the positions of ordonnateur. MM. Sané, Groignard, Chevillard and Segondat were sent, the first to Brest, the second to Toulon, the third to Rochefort and the fourth to Lorient.²³⁷

Since, said the minister in a letter addressed to the Directory, the management of port movements, the construction, outfitting, and repairs of vessels are placed under the orders of the ordonnateur, I cannot make a better choice. The Convention, in adopting a provision establishing the incompatibility of military functions with the position of ordonnateur, had primarily intended to place administrators at the head of the ports. Admiral Truguet had managed to elude this intention, of which he was not unaware. His conduct aroused great irritation in the Councils. On April 6, 1796, the government informed the Council of Five Hundred that the order had been sent to all ports to put the new legislation into force. As soon as the reading of this message was completed, several members of the Assembly took the floor to accuse Admiral Truguet of having complied neither with the text nor with the spirit of the law. "The minister," said the opponents, "has made a game of the law, because it displeases him; he has affected to appoint to the important positions of commissioners constructors engineers, whom he should have left occupied with the construction of ships. As for the skilled administrators, he has completely forgotten them, at the moment when everything made it his duty to surround himself with their enlightenment. Legislators, never forget," added one of them, "that the Constitution has charged you with supervising the execution of the laws. Make sure that the law of the navy has been executed as it should have been." I request that the Board of Directors be required to send you the list of newly elected directors, and that you know whether they meet the prescribed conditions."²³⁸

A member of the Assembly managed to convince his colleagues that this method of proceeding, acceptable under the Convention, when it exercised sovereignty, was unacceptable under the current form of government. The Council of Five Hundred, adopting this opinion, moved on to the next item of business. These discussions only deepened the antagonism existing between the Minister of the Navy and the Councils. The members of both Assemblies, who had been part of the Naval Committee under the Convention, had fought with genuine determination to maintain the laws passed on October 24 and 25, 1795. Unfortunately, the institutions they had championed could only be useful to our enemies.

The financial situation posed continual obstacles to naval operations. The administrators had nothing to offer to the suppliers, in exchange for the supplies necessary for our arsenals, but paper. Now, the assignats had fallen, at the end of 1795, into such discredit that twelve hundred francs in paper were worth barely twenty francs in silver. Under the conventional regime, the representatives of the people on mission seized, as soon as they became aware of their existence and wherever they were, all the objects necessary for the service of the State. The price of the goods, established according to illusory tariffs, was paid in assignats. This method of acquisition did not even expose the government to the complaints of the interested parties. The latter, knowing the dangers to which they would expose themselves by complaining, kept silent. These days have no tomorrow. The merchants, stripped by these summary procedures, left their stores empty, waiting to fill them for times more favorable to freedom of transactions.²³⁹

When the Directory took office, trade offered only insignificant resources. On the other hand, public opinion was openly hostile to the use of measures characteristic of the era we had just experienced. Assignats, forced currency, and the maximum law were means that could no longer be used. The sale of material goods therefore ceased to be obligatory; on the other hand, since the government continued to pay with paper, few merchants agreed to enter into relations with the navy. In Paris and the ports, the administration found itself faced with insubstantial men. These men, knowing that the destitution of the arsenals did not allow us to be demanding, did not execute or executed poorly the clauses of their contracts. Other unfortunate consequences arose from the shortage of the Treasury. The workers, being paid in assignats, received an illusory salary. It had been decided that the ration would be allocated to them. The officers on land and the employees had hastened to request the same favor. The bread ration had been granted to them. The personnel serving in the ports was out of proportion with the naval forces that France maintained. The luxury of the establishments on land, compared with a modest situation for the truly useful navy, the one that goes to sea, is a spectacle often given by powers in which the maritime spirit is not very developed. In any case, the administration spent the greater part of its resources ensuring the daily subsistence of the numerous ration holders who lived on the navy's budget.²⁴⁰

II

Since the beginning of the war, France's naval forces had been deployed in the seas of Europe. The conventional government had sometimes been concerned with the colonies, but plans to defend or supply them had been abandoned as soon as they were conceived. For this purpose, barely a few rare frigates had left our ports, carrying insignificant supplies of men and munitions. The Directory showed great concern for our overseas possessions. These were considered, at that time, a source of wealth. Public opinion would not have readily admitted that our finances could ever be restored and public credit reestablished if, at the end of the war, we found ourselves without colonies. We believed so much in their usefulness that the Directory had demanded from Spain, in exchange for the conquests that we had restored to that power, at the conclusion of peace, the cession of the territory that it possessed on the island of Santo Domingo. The system of exclusive protection of national trade and industry then dominated. The surplus of our production was consumed in the colonies. Navigation between our overseas possessions and the metropolis was completely reserved for our flag. It formed the principal element of trade, at the same time as it constituted a nursery of sailors.²⁴¹

Despite the fierce struggle between France and most of the European powers, the cessation of hostilities was considered, in 1795, to be very imminent. In our country as well as on the other side of the strait, this eventuality was not lost sight of. It was not only to deprive its enemies of ports of refuge or supply that England was in such haste to conquer the colonies of Holland and France. This power knew that the restitutions that would be demanded of it, the day when the conditions of peace were discussed, would be all the less great the more conquests it had made. France must therefore neglect nothing to get through the war period, while preserving its colonial possessions.

On January 19, 1796, the Directory instructed the Minister of the Navy to proceed, as quickly as possible, to the organization of the troops intended to garrison the colonies. The framework of this corps was fixed as follows: two division generals, eight brigadier generals, eight adjutant generals, twelve war commissioners and thirty-two thousand soldiers. On January 25, 1796, the Councils gave the Directory authorization to send agents to Saint-Domingue, Guadeloupe, Saint Lucia, Cayenne, the Isle of France and Réunion. If the adoption of these measures presented no difficulty, the same was not true of their execution. The enemy had acquired such superiority that all our enterprises encountered the greatest obstacles.²⁴²

At the start of hostilities, the English had at sea one hundred and thirty-five vessels of all ranks, manned by forty-four thousand five hundred men; in 1794, two hundred and seventy-nine ships and eighty-eight thousand five hundred men; finally, in 1795, three hundred and twenty-six ships and one hundred thousand sailors. In 1796, there was a further increase. That year, England had three hundred and seventy-six ships at sea. The number of men embarked, sailors or marines, reached one hundred and ten thousand men. At the same time, the general staff included one hundred and five general officers, seven hundred senior officers, and two thousand two hundred and eighty junior officers. This situation, compared with the picture we have drawn of our navy at the end of 1795, shows how heavy the task assumed by the new administration was.

Two naval divisions were dispatched to Saint-Domingue. The first, consisting of two seventy-four-gun ships and a frigate, left Rochefort. The second, composed of a forty-gun frigate, a corvette, and eight transports, left Brest. They carried troops, weapons, munitions, Division Generals Rochambeau and Pestourneaux, some civil servants, and the agents to whom the Directory had entrusted the mission of repairing the disasters that our faults had heaped upon this once flourishing colony. The two divisions arrived safely at Cap Français. At the end of 1796, the ships that were part of it returned to our ports, with the exception of the *Méduse*. This frigate, sinking in the water, was given over to the flames; the crew went over to a ship that was escorting it. The Isle of France and Réunion had escaped all the evils that the deplorable measures taken by the conventional government had inflicted on our colonies in the Antilles.²⁴³

They had remained outside the revolutionary movement. The distance separating them from the mother country and the wisdom of the inhabitants had led to this result. The colonists, knowing what had happened in Saint-Domingue, Martinique, and Guadeloupe, had resolved to protect themselves and their families from such dreadful eventualities. The white population, which had remained in close union, had refused to proclaim the freedom of the blacks. The two islands no longer obeyed the government. They would have liked to interrupt all communication with the mother country. The rumor of the arrival of a squadron or troops coming from our ports aroused the most serious fears. In each of these colonies, authority rested with an assembly whose decisions had the force of law when sanctioned by the governor. The latter, who was in complete agreement with the inhabitants, exercised all the rights belonging to the executive branch. He was also responsible for commanding the troops. Numerous privateers harassed enemy trade; their captures brought goods and money to the two islands. By the end of 1795, the frigates *Cybèle*, *Prudente*, and *Preneuse* and the corvette *Coureur* were the only vessels representing the state navy in the Indian Ocean. The Île-de-France was too important, from a maritime and military point of view, not to attract the attention of the Directory. The new government decided that reinforcements would be sent there.²⁴⁴

In March 1796, Rear Admiral Sercey set sail for this destination with the frigates *La Forte*, on which he had his flag, *La Régénérée*, *La Seine*, and the corvettes *La Bonne-Citoyenne* and *La Mutine*. These vessels carried some troops, munitions, and agents Baco and Burnel, appointed governors of Île-de-France and Réunion. A few days after setting sail, the two avisos suffered damage and became separated from the division. Both fell into English hands (1). Admiral Sercey anchored off Santa Cruz, the main town on the island of Palma, one of the Canary Islands, to await the frigate *La Vertu*, whose fitting-out was still in progress when he left the island of Aix. After being joined by this vessel, he continued on his way. The division arrived in the harbor of Port Louis on June 18. During its crossing, it had taken several heavily laden merchant ships. Rear-Admiral Sercey found the frigates *La Prudente* and *La Cybèle*, and the brig *Le Moineau*, in the harbor. The latter vessel had left Rochefort in February to bring news to the Isle of France of the imminent arrival of a division of four frigates.

1. *La Bonne Citoyenne* was taken to Portsmouth. The helmsman Zélis and the coastal pilot Thierry, belonging to the crew of this corvette, had been in captivity for seven months when they attempted to escape. Arrested, they were put in prison. Some time later, they were taken, with six other Frenchmen, to the prisoner depot for Botany Bay. They resolved to escape, by flight, the miserable fate that awaited them. They were recaptured once again. After eight months of rigorous detention, they were embarked on a ship of five hundred tons, armed with twenty-two cannons, named *Lady Shore*, on which there were already one hundred and nineteen prisoners. There was, on board this vessel, which was manned by twenty-six crewmen, a garrison of fifty-eight soldiers. The *Lady Shore* set sail on March 28, 1796. On August 1, Zélis and Thierry were masters of the English ship. Zélis, after having landed some of his prisoners on the coast of Brazil, anchored off Montevideo on August 31, 1796. There are few examples of men having displayed such energy to regain their freedom.²⁴⁵

Agents Baco and Burnel disembarked. Well received by the military and administrative authorities, they were able to believe that they would easily occupy the position to which the government's trust had called them. This hope was promptly dashed. The colonial assembly instructed some of its members to meet with the representatives of the Directory and inquire about their attitudes regarding the issue of slavery. They made no secret of their intention to proclaim the Constitution of the Year III and implement it immediately in both colonies. When this news became known, such agitation reigned in the city that drastic measures had to be taken to ensure the safety of the two agents. A general uprising of the white population was imminent. Not three times twenty-four hours had passed since the envoys of the Directory had set foot on the soil of the colony when they were both forced to take refuge on the brig *Moineau*. The captain of this vessel received orders to set sail immediately. He was to take his two passengers to Manila. This event deprived Admiral Sercey of the services of *Moineau*, the only aviso he had at his disposal. A month after his arrival, Rear-Admiral Sercey set sail with the forty-gun frigates *Forte*, *Régénérée*, *Vertu*, and *Cybèle*, the thirty-six-gun frigates *Prudente* and *Seine*, and the privateer brig *Alerte*, which had been requisitioned to replace *Moineau*.

Admiral Sercey intended to surprise the numerous English merchant ships scattered along the Coromandel coast.²⁴⁶

When he entered Port Louis, the enemy cruiser, which usually stationed there, had disappeared. Consequently, the admiral was able to complete the planned operation before the presence of the French division was known, and sufficient forces had been sent to search for it. An unfortunate incident deprived us of the fortunate opportunity presented by this expedition. After holding the sea in the south of the island of Ceylon and capturing some ships, the division headed north. Approaching land, the *Alerte* was sent to reconnoitre, with orders to report to the admiral any information he could obtain on the state of the enemy forces and the number of vessels located at the various anchorages along the Coromandel coast. The captain of the *Alerte* had no sense of his duties in the least. His only concern was to capture some richly laden ship. On the night of August 19, he sighted a large vessel. Without taking the time to recognize it, he ran toward it and boarded it. This supposed merchant ship was an English frigate of twenty-eight guns, which captured the privateer. Since the captain of the *Alerte* did not destroy his instructions, the enemy was informed of our presence; the English, not being in force to fight us, resorted to ruse to ward off the dangers to their trade. They let dispatches fall into our hands announcing that the Coromandel coast was guarded by a large number of warships. The admiral, whose mission consisted mainly of harming enemy trade, abandoned these waters. He headed for the Strait of Malacca with the intention of destroying the English settlement at Pulo-Pinang.²⁴⁷

On September 8, after capturing a few ships at Achem, on the north coast of Sumatra, our frigates encountered two large ships. One of them was the *Arrogant*, eighty-strong, and the second, the *Victorious*, seventy-four. At daybreak on the 9th, the battle began. At 9:00 a.m., the *Arrogant*, badly battered, moved away. Our ships then directed their fire on the second vessel. Around ten o'clock, the latter left to join its convoy, which was already more than a mile from the battlefield. Two of our frigates, held up by the calm, had played only a very minor role in the action. If, after the *Arrogant* had moved away, all our ships had been able to fight the *Victorious*, there is reason to believe that this vessel would have lowered its flag. A light breeze, which arose before its damage was considerable enough to put it out of action, saved it. The admiral did not think it appropriate to press his advantage further. He feared, by continuing the fight, to expose his ships to damage which would have made it impossible for them, for a time, perhaps a very long time, to undertake anything. In this engagement two frigates, the *Vertu* and the *Seine*, suffered particularly. The first received serious damage and the second lost many men. Of the six frigates, one hundred and forty-six men were put out of action. These losses were distributed as follows: the *Seine*, eighteen killed, including its commander, and forty-four wounded; the *Forte*, six killed and seventeen wounded; the *Cybèle*, four killed and thirteen wounded; the *Vertu*, nine killed and fifteen wounded; the *Prudente*, three killed and nine wounded; the *Régénérée*, two killed and six wounded.²⁴⁸

According to English reports, the *Arrogant* had seven killed and thirty-seven wounded, and the *Victorious* seventeen killed and fifty-seven wounded. Both vessels also suffered extensive damage to their hulls and masts. Admiral Sercey headed for the Merguy Archipelago and anchored off King Island on December 15. After making the most urgent repairs, the French division put back to sea. Several months had passed since we left Port Louis. It was necessary to consider resupplying our ships, whose supplies and spare parts were running low. Since the Isle of France did not offer sufficient resources, the admiral headed for Batavia. He arrived there after making several captures along the way.

Some writers have criticized Admiral Sercey's conduct on September 9. He should have pursued the *Arrogant* and the *Victorious*, they said. In all things, and especially in war, one must know what one wants. It was believed at that time that, in the state of our navy, the only way to harm the enemy was to attack its commerce. One could not simultaneously approve of this doctrine and blame Admiral Sercey for having applied it. This flag officer had received orders to pursue English commerce and to defend the Isle of France and Réunion. He was not permitted, without failing in his duty, to lose sight of these two points. Now, behind the six frigates placed under his command, there were, in the Indian Ocean, only two ships, a frigate, the *Preneuse*, and a corvette, the *Brûle-Gueule*, to represent our flag. Consequently, the admiral considered it necessary to maintain the means of action without which he could not comply with the orders of the government.²⁴⁹

The English, covering the seas with their warships and striving to join ours, were fulfilling their role. By removing the cause, they were eliminating the effect, that is, the destruction of their merchant navy. The captains of the *Arrogant* and the *Victorious* would have been guilty if they had not engaged the French frigates. They were certain that following this battle, the latter, forced to seek a port to repair their damage, would leave the sea free to Great Britain's trade. On the other hand, our ships had to elude the enemy's pursuit and relentlessly pursue its commerce. So, if, on September 9, Admiral Sercey, rightly considered a distinguished officer, thought that the action, if prolonged, would make it impossible for him to continue his mission, he had been right not to pursue the two vessels, and the success achieved by his division remained entirely his.

III

It will be recalled that Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse, after the battle of June 23, 1796, not finding himself safe off the island of Groix, had entered Lorient. This port was so deprived of supplies that he was unable to feed the personnel of this squadron. Moreover, the squadron, before putting back to sea, was in urgent need of repairs.²⁵⁰

The minister gave the order to disarm the vessels and dismiss the crews. A few men were kept to contribute, along with the garrison, to the defense of the city. At the same time as our navy was giving this demonstration of impotence, England was landing on our shores. It was attempting to rekindle, in the Vendée, the civil war that Hoche's conduct, no less than his successes, had ended. When the vessels, placed under the command of Admiral Villaret, were repaired, the minister ordered them to be sent to Brest. Since the Lorient port administration had been unable to gather the necessary number of sailors to rearm them, they were divided into three divisions. The first departed for its destination. Upon his arrival, most of his personnel returned to Lorient to complete the crews of the second division. The same procedure was followed for the third. It was only during the month of May 1796 that Admiral Villaret's nine vessels were assembled in the harbor of Brest. We will not dwell on the low value of vessels subjected to such alternatives. We know the difference between a ship that has just received its crew and one whose fitting out dates back several years. These two vessels have no point of comparison between them. Matters of war and navigation, which the former will approach with reserve, will be resolved with as much calm as confidence by the latter. With these successive fittings and disarmaments, it would be some time before the government possessed, in the Ocean, a maritime force capable of attempting, with any chance of success, any useful enterprise.²⁵¹

We have seen that the port of Toulon had received orders in July 1795 to arm two divisions. The first of these divisions was that of Commander Richery. We have reported on its successful exit from the Mediterranean and its entry into Cadiz, with the prizes it had made off Cape Saint Vincent. The second division, composed of a seventy-four-gun ship, four frigates, and two corvettes, was placed under the command of Captain Ganteaume. The instructions given to this officer prescribed that he cruise in the Archipelago in order to intercept enemy trade there.

Departing from Toulon on October 10, Commander Ganteaume successfully reached his destination. With his division, he captured some prizes belonging to the merchant navy of England, Russia and the Two Sicilies. Finally, he freed a French frigate and two corvettes, which had been held for over a year in the harbor of Smyrna by an enemy division. Our presence led to the capture of the twenty-eight-gun frigate, the *Némésis*. The latter, unaware of our movements, dropped anchor off Smyrna, believing itself to be in perfect safety. Two French vessels, a frigate and a corvette, came to anchor near it during the night. The next day, at daybreak, the *Némésis*, ordered to surrender, lowered its flag. After a five-month cruise, our vessels returned to Toulon. Commander Ganteaume had had the good fortune, in such a confined sea, to conceal his march from the detachments charged with pursuing him. The two operations we have just spoken of dated back to the conventional regime, since the Richery and Ganteaume divisions had left Toulon, the first on September 14, and the second on October 10, 1795.²⁵²

The lack of personnel was one of the greatest obstacles the Navy Department encountered in reorganizing our naval forces. There were no more sailors to be found. Some had fallen into the hands of the English in the disproportionate fighting we had waged since the beginning of the war. Others had fled their homeland. Those still in France were in hiding, and all attempts to bring them, willingly or by force, onto warships were unsuccessful. Admiral Truguet addressed a proclamation to the sailors of the South and West. After promising the deserters that they would not be disturbed, he declared that those of them who went willingly to Toulon or Brest would receive, upon their arrival, six months' advances in cash. Their families would receive, for the duration of their embarkation, in addition to cash aid, the rations granted to the families of workers employed in ports and arsenals. The seafarers and their families had been so often deceived that the minister's promises produced no effect. A decree of the Directory, dated 10 September 1796, enacting the most severe penalties against sailors who evaded searches by maritime registration agents and against municipal authorities accused of encouraging their disobedience, had no more success. How could the sailors have believed the sincerity of the minister, declaring that they would receive upon their arrival, either in Brest or in Toulon, "six months' advance in cash", when the men present on the State vessels had not received anything that was owed to them for several years.²⁵³

The Directory bore the brunt of the mistakes committed by the regime that preceded it. Admiral Truguet could only change this state of affairs by acquiring personal claims to the trust of the seafarers. Paying the crews, distributing the shares of prizes to which the sailors were entitled, and supporting their families—these were the measures that would have brought sailors back to the fleet. In any case, Brest was experiencing the greatest difficulty in completing the crews of the ships commanded by Admiral Villaret. In Toulon, we had no available forces. Since the departure of the Richery and Ganteaume divisions, nothing had been done to put Admiral Martin's ships back to sea. The port of Toulon had to provide for the maintenance of a flotilla that would bring munitions, artillery, and supplies to the Army of Italy. Our military interests required that the navigation of this flotilla not be suspended or even slowed down. The minister ordered that all resources not required for this purpose be devoted to the fitting out of five vessels. These vessels, placed under the command of Rear-Admiral Villeneuve, were to cross the strait and join Vice-Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse's squadron at Brest.

Since taking office, the Directory had been making great efforts to form a coalition against England. On August 19, 1796, the ambassador of the Republic, Major General Pérignon, signed a treaty of offensive and defensive alliance with Spain.²⁵⁴

Each of the two powers had the right to request the other to place at its disposal a squadron and troops. The squadron consisted of fifteen ships of the line, including three three-deckers or eighty-guns, and twelve seventy-fours, six frigates, and four corvettes or light vessels. All these ships had to be equipped, armed, and supplied with provisions for six months. The number of soldiers was set at twenty-five thousand. These troops could be used in Europe or in the defense of the colonies that the contracting powers possessed in the Gulf of Mexico.

The alliance between France and Spain targeted only England, since this power was the only one against which the court of Madrid had grievances. It was therefore stipulated that Spain would maintain neutrality with regard to all nations, with the exception of Great Britain, armed against the Republic. The Councils ratified this treaty on September 12, 1796. Sent immediately to Madrid, it was signed by the king. During the course of these negotiations, and before the treaty which was to bind us so closely with Spain was concluded, we had asked that power to escort Admiral Richery's division offshore. The cabinet of Madrid had consented to this and our ships left Cadiz on August 4, at the same time as a Spanish squadron placed under the command of Admiral Don Juan de Langara. The detachment of the English fleet, which was usually on observation off Cadiz, had left its post several days earlier. When the Spanish army was outside the passes, ten ships and six frigates, under the command of Rear Admiral Solano, were designated to sail in convoy with our ships.²⁵⁵

Admiral Solano was ordered to join forces with ours in the event of an attack. After traveling 100 leagues westward, Admirals Solano and Richery separated. The former returned to Cadiz, and the latter headed for North America. The French division consisted of the *Victoire*, an eighty-ship, and the seventy-four-ships: the *Jupiter*, the *Barras*, the *Berwick*, the *Resolution*, the *Censeur*, and the *Duquesne*.

By the time the treaty, signed on August 19, 1796, by General Pérignon and the Prince of Peace, arrived in Paris, the court in London had already been concerned for some time about the intimate nature of our relations with Spain. However, she had not managed to understand the goal we were aiming for. The discussion that took place in the Councils, when the treaty was submitted for approval to these Assemblies, taught the English what they had been ignorant of. They immediately placed an embargo on Spanish ships in their ports. The Madrid cabinet responded to this measure with a declaration of war. It accompanied it with a manifesto in which the grievances Spain had against Great Britain were enumerated at length.

IV

Major military events changed our situation in the Mediterranean. General Bonaparte, placed at the head of the Army of Italy on February 23, 1796, entered the field the following month.²⁵⁶

Within days, Piedmont no longer had an army. On May 15, the court of Turin signed a peace treaty with the Republic. It ceded the County of Nice and Savoy to France. A few months later, the armies of Beaulieu and Wurmser were destroyed and the Austrians driven from all their positions. The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies submitted to the obligation to deny its ports to the warring parties. Towards the end of June, the French entered Livorno. Upon learning of their presence in this city, the English attributed to General Bonaparte the intention of conquering the island of Elba. Lord Elliot, who governed Corsica as viceroy, decided to get ahead of us on this point. In the first days of July, the English occupied the citadel of Porto Ferrajo. The officer who commanded, in the name of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, offered no resistance. This operation weakened the British forces in Corsica. On the other hand, the victories of the Army of Italy excited great enthusiasm among the inhabitants. The number of malcontents grew larger every day, and insurrections soon broke out. The English, too few in number to hold the countryside, withdrew to the towns. As soon as Leghorn was in our possession, General Bonaparte gave the order to secretly prepare for an expedition which was to be coordinated with the Corsican refugees. On October 19, despite the surveillance of enemy ships, General Casalta landed on the island with a detachment of regular troops. He was followed, a few days later, by General Gentili who no less happily crossed the English cruise.²⁵⁷

These two generals seized, with the help of the inhabitants, Bastia, Ajaccio, and Bonifacio. The English garrisons, leaving prisoners in our hands, escaped by sea. This was the situation when Lord Elliot and the commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean squadron, Sir John Jervis, received the order to evacuate Corsica. The decision of the court in London was the consequence of the new attitude of the cabinet in Madrid. To take such precautions, the English must have had great illusions about the extent of the assistance that the Spanish navy would provide to ours. Sir John Jervis recalled the ships cruising around the various points of the Mediterranean, ordering them to join his flag in the Bay of Saint-Florent.

Admiral Don Juan de Langara left Cadiz on September 25, 1796, with nineteen ships. A few days later, he crossed the Strait of Gibraltar. On October 1, at daybreak, his army's scouts reported seven ships. It was Rear-Admiral Mann's squadron, coming from the Bay of Saint-Florent and heading for England. Three transports and a merchant brig accompanied it. The numerical superiority of the Spanish did not allow the English admiral to run the risk of an engagement. He gave chase, covering himself with sails. On October 3, towards the evening, the English squadron reached the anchorage of Gibraltar, leaving, in the hands of its adversaries, only a transport and the merchant brig. The Spanish, wrote Nelson in 1795, "make fine ships, but they will not make men so easily. Their fleet has only bad crews. Besides, they are slow and lacking in activity."²⁵⁸

It is claimed, he said, in 1796, that Spain agreed to provide the French Republic with fourteen ships of the line ready for sea. I assume these are unmanned vessels, since taking them with such personnel would be the surest way for the Republic to be promptly rid of them. In the event that this treaty brings war between us and the Spanish, I am sure that the matter of their fleet will soon be settled, if it is not better than the one they possessed when they were our allies." If the Spanish, as Nelson said, had fine vessels, one must believe that the arrangements adopted for the rigging, masting, and sails of these vessels negated the advantages due to the shape of their hulls. It is, indeed, difficult to understand how a certain number of vessels, out of the nineteen ships and ten frigates that comprised Don Juan de Langara's Fleet, failed, in a pursuit lasting more than forty-eight hours, to catch up with the poor sailors of the English squadron. What seems even more extraordinary is that, out of three transports, two managed to escape. Don Juan de Langara, after calling off the chase, resumed his original route. A few days later, he entered Cartagena, where he found seven ships of the line, bringing to twenty-six the number of vessels under his command.

The Spanish fleet cruised in the waters between the coast of Spain and Corsica. Towards the end of October, it became aware of the English squadron, then anchored in the Bay of Saint-Florent. This completed the embarkation of the men and equipment of the occupation corps.²⁵⁹

Since the departure of Rear Admiral Mann, whom the Spanish had uselessly driven off, Sir John Jervis's squadron was reduced to fifteen ships. Admiral Don Juan de Langara had a very great superiority over the English. Instead of taking advantage of this situation to attack them, he moved away. One wonders why this admiral did not attempt to destroy, with his twenty-six ships, the fifteen vessels laden with troops and munitions of his adversary. If the commander-in-chief of the Spanish fleet had decided to fight the English in the Bay of Saint-Florent, he would have had the fortunate fortune to surprise them without orders in a harbor that was not protected from the landward side. He could, if he deemed it preferable, wait for this squadron at sea. Admiral Don Juan de Langara remained inactive. Did he sense the weakness of his squadron, or did his government's orders dictate that he not seek out the enemy and only fight if attacked? In any case, abandoning the favorable opportunities that lay before him, the admiral brought his fleet back to Toulon. In the first days of November, Sir John Jervis, having become certain that the Spanish squadron was not at sea, set sail with fifteen ships, frigates, and a few transports. At the beginning of December, he reached Gibraltar.

England was constantly concerned about the armaments we were building at Brest. Any force assembled in that harbor inspired the most serious apprehensions. The ministry feared, every day, to learn that a French squadron, after having escaped the forces arrayed on its route, had thrown, onto the soil of Great Britain, an army of these valiant soldiers who had already carried so high the glory of our arms.²⁶⁰

The situation of our navy at the end of 1795, that is, after the battle of the island of Groix, had calmed England's apprehensions. But since the beginning of 1796, she had been following with a worried eye the efforts we were making to increase Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse's squadron by a few ships. The English were too well aware of their numerical superiority to believe that we would risk the fate of arms in a squadron battle. They assumed that these preparations related to some expedition, both maritime and military. In London, it was thought that we were hesitating between the following projects: taking Gibraltar, forcing the entrance to the Tagus and dictating peace to Portugal under the walls of Lisbon, or invading Ireland. Our alliance with Spain gave some likelihood to the first of these suppositions. On the other hand, the attack on Gibraltar presented, from a maritime point of view, such difficulties that the English admiralty could not believe that this was really the aim we were pursuing. It was not the same for the other two hypotheses. Penetrating the Tagus by force, with a squadron leaving Brest, while deceiving the surveillance of the English, was a plan of campaign which had been publicly discussed in France. Finally, came the Irish expedition which affected more directly the interests of our adversaries. The naval forces of Great Britain occupied positions allowing them to face these various eventualities. A first squadron was cruising off Brest; a second was located offshore. The latter was to intercept any shipping, bound for Ireland, which managed to deceive the surveillance of the blockade squadron.²⁶¹

The mouth of the Texel was guarded by Admiral Duncan. A reserve squadron, commanded by Admiral Bridport, was anchored at Spithead, ready to sail wherever its presence was needed. Sir John Jervis was at Gibraltar. He was observing Cadiz and was in a position to arrive either at the entrance to the Tagus or off Brest.

Admiral Richery, as we mentioned above, had left Cadiz on August 4, escorted by a Spanish squadron. Immediately after separating from Admiral Solano, he set sail for North America. He destroyed several English settlements on the coast of the island of Newfoundland and captured eighty merchant ships. Convinced that his prizes could not reach our ports, he burned them. Admiral Richery anchored in the harbor of the island of Aix on November 5, 1796. In the first days of September, he had detached the commander Allemand, with the ships *Duquesne* and *Censeur*, and the frigate *Friponne*, to the coast of Labrador. About twenty merchant ships were captured by this division. Finally, our presence forced the English to evacuate several points they occupied in the Bay of Châteaux. The commander Allemand, eluding the squadrons cruising the landings of our ports to intercept him, anchored off the island of Groix on November 10, 1796. The English not only suffered the damage we have just described, they also lost the benefits of this fishing season.

Towards the end of November, Admiral Truguet was informed that the five ships and the frigate, placed under the command of Admiral Villeneuve, had completed what the offices called their fitting out.²⁶²

In reality, these ships, barely provisioned, were manned by crews, most of whom had never sailed. However, Admiral Villeneuve's intention was not to head out to sea, hoping to remain several months without encountering the enemy, which would have given him time to organize his division. He was heading for Brest in the middle of winter, with the near certainty of encountering considerable forces along the way. On December 5, the Spanish squadron, after remaining thirty-five days in the harbor of Toulon, set sail at the same time as Admiral Villeneuve's division. The latter was composed of the ships the *Formidable*, of eighty, *Jean-Jacques-Rousseau*, *Jemmapes*, *Tyrannicide* and *Mont-Blanc*, of seventy-four, and the frigate *Vestale*, of thirty-two. The Spaniards made way for Cartagena while our ships headed for the Strait of Gibraltar, which they crossed on the afternoon of December 10, with winds from the east to the east-southeast blowing in a storm. They were sighted by the ships of Sir John Jervis. This admiral judged it useless to pursue ships fleeing before the weather. If the wind had been less violent, Admiral Villeneuve would not have dared to appear, in broad daylight, in the strait. On the other hand, with suitable weather, the French admiral, whatever precautions he had taken, would have had difficulty, even during the night, in eluding the enemy's surveillance. In this hypothesis, superior forces would have been sent in pursuit of him. If he had been caught, he would have been taken with all his ships. One should not fear, in certain circumstances, exposing oneself to such risks. But since Spain was our ally, one wonders why Admiral Don Juan de Langara did not accompany our ships to the Atlantic.²⁶³

After having so happily crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, the French division continued its route north.

Sir John Jervis, assuming that Admiral Villeneuve was going to the Antilles, sent a warning to the admirals commanding the stations of Jamaica and Barbados to bring them this news. The gale, which allowed our ships to pass the Strait of Gibraltar, in full view of the enemy, was fatal to the English squadron. The *Courageux*, of seventy-four, was lost. The *Gibraltar*, of eighty, and the *Culloden*, of seventy-four, were on the verge of suffering the same fate. The frigate *Vestale*, belonging to Admiral Villeneuve's division, had suffered damage in the gale of December 10. She was heading for Cadiz for repairs when, on the 18th, she encountered the English frigate *Terpsichore*. After two hours of very fierce fighting, *Vestale* lowered her colors. Before the enemy had taken possession of the French frigate, the latter's mast fell. The commander, two officers and twenty-seven men had been killed; the number of wounded rose to thirty-eight. *Terpsichore* had four men killed and eighteen wounded. The damage to this frigate was of no importance. The two ships were of equal strength. The engagement, which began when the two ships were abeam and very close to each other, continued under the same conditions. No maneuvers had been made that could have any influence on the outcome of the fight. It was therefore an artillery battle. Musketry had played a part in the result, but only on the English side.²⁶⁴

The French frigate had a few guns, but they were in such a state that it had not been possible to use them. We see the easy triumphs we were preparing for our enemies. By the time the battle had ended, the two frigates were close to land. The officer in charge of command of the *Vestale* anchored; the *Terpsichore* put out to sea. The next day, the captain of the English frigate approached his prize, but the state of the sea did not allow him to take it in tow, so he moved away again. The French took the enemy crew prisoner, and they entered Cadiz, with the help of boats sent to meet them. The order to evacuate the citadel of Porto Ferrayo, which was still occupied by British troops, reached Sir John Jervis a few days after his arrival off Gibraltar. Commodore Nelson, to whom this mission was entrusted, left with the frigates, the *Minerve*, carrying his guidon, and the *Blanche*. On December 16, Sir John Jervis sailed from Gibraltar and anchored, on the 21st, under the walls of Lisbon with fourteen ships. The English admiral did not find the reinforcements he expected. The Court of London, concerned about the destination of the ships anchored in the harbor of Brest, did not dare to reduce the number of ships placed under the command of Admirals Colpoys and Bridport. The first was blockading the port of Brest and the second was commanding the reserve squadron. This one, anchored at Portsmouth, had to, as we have already said, be constantly ready to put to sea.²⁶⁵

BOOK VIII

Proposed landing in Ireland. - General Hoche is placed in command of the land and sea forces intended for this expedition. - Morard de Galle replaces Admiral Villaret-Joyeuse in command of the Brest squadron. - Arrival of Richery's division. - Departure of the fleet. - Sinking of the *Séduisant*. - The ships are dispersed during the night of December 16. - Rally, near the Irish coast, of almost all the ships of the expedition. - Admiral Bouvet heads for Bantry Bay. - Further dispersion of the fleet. - Some ships return to Bantry Bay. - Return of the expedition ships to Brest. - Navigation of the frigate *La Fraternité*, carrying General Hoche and Admiral Morard de Galle. - Meeting of the *Révolution* and the *Scevola*. - The *Fraternité* and the *Révolution* anchored in the harbor of the Isle of Aix. - Ships lost or captured by the enemy. - Battle of the ship the *Droits-de-l'Homme*. - The navy's share in the expedition's failure. - Movements of the squadrons commanded by Admirals Lord Bridport and Colpoys.

I

Based on the course of military events in Italy, we could foresee a prompt conclusion of peace with Austria. Only one power, England, remained beyond our reach. Among the campaign plans presented to Paris to compensate for the relative weakness of our navy through some clever combination, was a proposed landing in Ireland. The inhabitants of that unfortunate country groaned under the weight of an unbearable tyranny. None of the promises made to them by William III, when the treaty of 1694 was signed, were being kept. Vexations of all kinds affected them in the freedom of their worship and in the peaceful enjoyment of their property.²⁶⁶

Governed despotically by a viceroy, subject to exceptional laws, Ireland was treated as a conquered country. The inhabitants, defeated but not subdued, had attempted several times to throw off the yoke of Great Britain. These rebellions, carried out partially, without any prior agreement between the malcontents, had been suppressed with the implacable severity deployed by the English to maintain obedience to their possessions. The Irish had substituted secret societies acting separately for a vast association into which almost all the inhabitants had joined. Not all Irish people had the same aspirations. Parliamentary reform and the emancipation of Catholics would have satisfied some, while others dreamed of absolute independence for their country. At the beginning of the war between France and England, the committee, placed at the head of the association, had sent emissaries to Paris to plead the cause of Ireland. They requested some troops, generals, arms and munitions. They affirmed that at the first news of the French landing, all men able to bear arms would fall under our flags.

The Convention had had too much to do in France and on the continent to think about Ireland. Besides, since the return of the squadron which had made the long winter cruise, we had been unable to attempt anything at sea. The resounding successes of the Army of Italy, the advantages won in Germany and the situation of our country, at the beginning of the Directory, revived the hopes of the Irish. During the year 1796, new emissaries came to Paris with the mission of renewing, to our government, the requests made previously.²⁶⁷

These envoys again gave the assurance that our troops would meet with the most devoted support from the population. For some time now, the Directory had been toying with this project. It believed, by putting it into execution, it would find the opportunity to strike a decisive blow against a hitherto elusive enemy. Nevertheless, the difficulties of the undertaking were so great that no one in Paris dared to make a definitive decision. The alliance with Spain and the promises of the Irish agents put an end to the hesitations. The expedition was resolved.

The government entrusted command of this difficult undertaking to General Hoche. That of the naval forces intended to carry the army to Ireland was given to Admiral Villaret. Hoche had the most extensive powers. The authorities of the port of Brest and the squadron commander were placed under his command. All the resources of the navy were devoted to this new plan of campaign. The councils of the Directory had discussed sending a squadron to India. Eight vessels, taken from those at Brest, had been designated for this service. The government postponed the execution of this project until the return of the fleet. Truguet assumed that Admiral Villaret, putting to sea at the beginning of November and returning to Brest immediately after the disembarkation of the troops, would be able to leave for India during the month of December.

Before fighting in Ireland, it was necessary to go there. Now, the transport of troops, in the presence of the English forces spread out along the route, presented the greatest difficulties.²⁶⁸

The most absolute indifference, with regard to the value of the vessels, was the particular hallmark of the maritime operations of this period. Admiral Truguet had at his disposal the Brest squadron commanded by Villaret-Joyeuse, the ships of Admiral Richery, who had returned to the island of Aix after his cruise along the coast of North America, and Admiral Villeneuve's division, which was in Toulon. This was enough for the maritime question to be considered resolved. Troops from the army that had pacified the Vendée set out to go to Brest. The minister ordered the arming of all the vessels in that port. The greatest activity was recommended to all officials of the department. We know what the scope of this expression was at the time. On ships, hastily repaired, the few sailors from the maritime registration that the authorities managed to seize were embarked. The crews were completed by conscripts, most of whom had never been to sea, and the administration hastened to inform the minister that his orders were being carried out. The navy, as a result of the disasters it had suffered since the beginning of the Revolution, was struck by a very great discredit. Admiral Truguet very much wanted it to regain public favor by striking actions. His intentions were obviously very good, but having remained in Paris since his expedition to Sardinia in 1793, he was unaware of the true situation of our fleets and our arsenals. He seemed to believe that enthusiasm was everything, and that to go to Ireland, it was enough to want to. "Everyone," Truguet wrote to Villaret on October 18, 1796, "has prejudices against the navy and perhaps against the minister who directs it."²⁶⁹

It is therefore up to all of us, minister, generals, and officers, to conduct ourselves with a zeal, devotion, and loyalty that will silence all our enemies." The minister granted Admiral Villaret complete freedom in the choice of general officers called upon to assist him. He sent him blank orders so that he could, himself, appoint the command of the ships that were to be added to his squadron.

Admiral Villaret did not share the minister's views. Truguet's optimism seemed exaggerated to him. He did not believe that the navy was capable of facing the difficulties of the task imposed on it. Villaret did not hide his point of view from Truguet. However, he assured him that his efforts would be devoted to the success of this operation. "You can," he wrote to him, "count on me as on any other yourself." The Directory was unaware of the singular position of this squadron leader, called upon to play an important role in a war affair of which he disapproved. Truguet maintained Villaret because he judged him, more than any other admiral, suitable to carry out this enterprise. However, he understood that his responsibility would be seriously engaged if Hoche complained to the Directory that the command of our naval forces had been entrusted to an opponent of the expedition. Accordingly, he informed the general, on behalf of the government, that, in the event that, due to his state of health or for any other reason, Admiral Villaret should relinquish his command, he had the authorization to place at the head of the squadron the rear-admiral whom he considered most worthy of fulfilling the views of the government.²⁷⁰

He could also choose the generals and captains called to serve under the command of this new leader. It was not long before it was learned in Paris that most of the squadron's officers were openly opposed to the Irish expedition. This shift in opinion was attributed to Admiral Villaret, whose dismissal was decided upon. The minister, extremely dissatisfied, took severe measures against several captains. As for Admiral Villaret, he wrote to him: "The Executive Directory, my dear General, tormented by the delays in an expedition that it regards as essentially linked to the glory of the Republic, on which a glorious peace perhaps depends, has asked me to report to it all the details relating to the arming of this expedition. I could not hide from him that not all minds were equally inclined to approve this movement of our naval forces threatened by the enemy cruising on our coasts. I could not, consequently, hide from him that you had always shown me the greatest repugnance for this last expedition and that it was only through excessive devotion that you agreed to take charge of it. I was not surprised that the Directory found it impolitic and dangerous to entrust such a delicate and at the same time so audacious mission to a general torn between his duty and his opinion. I had thought like him for a long time and I was wrong to wait for him to deprive me, by his decree, of a measure that I should have proposed to him myself." It was on Admiral Morard de Galle, commander of the arms at Brest, that the Directory chose to replace Villaret.

The new commander-in-chief was very surprised at a favor he had not requested.²⁷¹

Accustomed to obeying, he immediately took command of the squadron, but he wrote to Paris that his weakened health prevented him from exercising it. Finally, he declared that he did not believe himself up to the task the government wanted to entrust to him. Consequently, he earnestly requested the Directors and the Minister to appoint a successor. The government did not accept his resignation. A man of duty, Morard de Galle submitted. In order to reassure him about the consequences that the outcome of the expedition could have for him, Truguet wrote to him: "I declare to you, my dear general, as a sailor who knows all the chances of combat and the elements of the sea, as a just and loyal minister, that no misfortune will be attributed to you since audacity and zeal will always have sought to prevent them and that I take responsibility for all accidents, just as I reserve exclusively for you all the glory of success." The minister instructed Morard de Galle to designate his successor as commander of the weapons in Brest. He gave him the freedom to keep or replace the general officers and captains who served in his squadron. Rear-Admiral Vence left his command; several captains were replaced. Division Chief Daugier, who commanded the *Fougueux*, passed on the *Cocarde-Nationale*. Morard de Galle gave a frigate to this officer, whose zeal and ability he knew, so much importance did he attach to being exactly informed of the enemy's movements. The government, wanting to show the esteem it held for the new commander-in-chief, decided that he would bear the title of admiral during the campaign.²⁷²

The minister was pressing for the squadron's departure. Unfortunately, the ship's outfitting was not proceeding as quickly as desired in Paris. Admiral Truguet was doing things no differently from his predecessors. He gave orders without worrying about whether they could be carried out. Morard de Galle complained very strongly about the extreme weakness of his crews, both in terms of numbers and quality. On November 29, he wrote to the minister: "The composition of the crews is so weak in terms of the type of men that there is every reason to fear, in the event of an encounter with the enemy, that the army will be compromised, both by the lack of precision in the execution of maneuvers, despite the zeal and goodwill that I assume everyone possesses." Unfortunately, this does not compensate for the lack of strength and intelligence." The minister, too committed to back down, dismissed these warnings which thwarted his plans and continued, in his dispatches, to order that preparations for the expedition be completed as quickly as possible. Morard de Galle hoisted his flag on the frigate *Fraternité*. Rear-admirals Bouvet and Nielly, commanding second in command, left their ships and went, the former to the *Immortalité* and the latter to the *Résolue*. These arrangements were made by virtue of an order signed by Hoche and Morard de Galle. This determination is not explained.

It had been decided, in 1794, on the proposal of Jean-Bon-Saint-André, that the admirals would place their flag on a frigate during the battle. The following year, representatives, repeating what was being said in the ports, or struck by the inconveniences which had occurred in the Mediterranean, in the battle of July 12, 1795, and, in the Ocean, in the battle of the island of Groix, denounced this decree as prejudicial to the good of the service.²⁷³

The Convention had to rule again on this point. This assembly should have left the task of settling this question to a committee of general officers whose decision it would have confirmed. But the Convention, accustomed to approving any proposal emanating from the Committee of Public Safety, adopted, on June 5, 1795, a new decree, according to which the admirals, commanding in chief of the squadrons, could, if they judged it necessary, transport themselves on a frigate, on the condition of reporting to the Committee of Public Safety. It will be noted that this decree did not settle the question. It probably had no other aim than to reconcile the opposing opinions of Jean-Bon-Saint-André, who had brought about the decree of 12 June 1794, and of the representatives who, the following year, demanded its suppression. It follows from the above that Admiral Morard de Galle could legally transfer to a frigate. As for the rear-admirals, commanding under orders, no provision of the decree issued in 1795 allowed them to do so. The Minister of the Navy had not been consulted. However, informed by the port that work was being done on board the *Résolue* to put this frigate in a condition to receive a general officer, he wrote to Morard de Galle to remind him that the two rear-admirals, serving under orders in his squadron, did not have the right to leave their ships. When this letter, which bore the date of November 27, arrived in Brest, it was several days since the measure against which the minister had protested had been implemented. Truguet's observations brought about no change.²⁷⁴

It was obvious that the army, after its landing in Ireland, would have only rare and difficult communications with France. Any naval forces that Great Britain might have, positioned between Brest and Ireland, would prevent relief from reaching the expeditionary force. It was necessary that our troops be, at the time of departure, in sufficient numbers to act, at least for a while, without receiving reinforcements. Imbued with this idea, the commander-in-chief requested that new ships be added to the fleet. Moreover, time was running out and the squadron would be at sea during the worst months of the year. This condition, very favorable for evading enemy surveillance, would have been very suitable for a good squadron. It could be disastrous for poorly armed ships encumbered with troops. The end of November arrived without the preparations being completed. On December 8, Admiral Richery set sail from the island of Aix with five ships and three frigates. Admiral Villeneuve, who was still in Toulon at the beginning of December, could no longer be relied upon. Admiral Richery entered Brest on the morning of the 11th, after having driven out to sea the English frigates which were cruising within sight of the port. As for Admiral Colpoys' squadron, he had seen it in the distance, in plain sight. The troops were embarked and the expeditionary fleet was ready to set sail. The winds were blowing from the east, a fortunate circumstance which had to be taken advantage of. The general in chief, constantly concerned with increasing the number of soldiers he took with him, wanted to use the ships of the Richery division.²⁷⁵

Only two ships, the *Pégase* and the *Revolution*, out of the five that comprised it, were deemed fit to put to sea. On December 15, these two vessels had not completed their preparations. The squadron weighed anchor and anchored at Camaret.

Two points, Bantry Bay and the entrance to the River Shannon, had been chosen for the landing of the troops. The admiral was ordered to head for the former. He was to head for the latter if some obstacle prevented him from reaching Bantry Bay. This bay, which is about twenty miles deep and at its narrowest point is no less than three to four miles, is located on the southwest coast of Ireland, a short distance from Cape Clear. Steep cliffs line the south-east coast. In the northern part and at the head of the bay, a few indentations, protected by islets, offer sheltered anchorages against the offshore winds. The bay is open to the west. Three anchorages had been arranged, in anticipation of circumstances which might arise. With easterly winds the fleet anchored at Bear Haven. If the winds blew from the west, it continued its route to the head of the bay. Some of the vessels anchored off Glengary Harbour, and the rest of the squadron took up position at the entrance to Bantry Harbour. If the fleet found very fine weather, it dropped anchor at the entrance to the River Cumbola. Similar arrangements had been made in case the landing took place in the River Shannon. Large-dot charts indicated the various anchorages that the expedition's ships were to occupy in Bantry Bay or the River Shannon.²⁷⁶

The admiral had various instructions printed, some relating to the landing at Bantry Bay and the River Shannon, others regulating the disembarkation of troops. The general officers and captains received sealed packets containing the documents we have just listed. They were to open them only upon order from the admiral or in the event of separation. Any captain separated from the army was instructed to reconnoitre Cape Misen-Head, located southwest of Ireland. It was stated that this captain would cruise for five days to the west of this cape at a distance varying between four and eight leagues. After this time, if no ship bearing orders appeared, he would reconnoitre the entrance to the River Shannon. If, after three days cruising off Cape Loops, he had no information on the position of the expeditionary fleet, he would return to Brest. There, he would report to the commander of the forces on the various circumstances of his voyage from the day he lost sight of the army until its arrival.

Since the Directory's sole objective was the landing of troops, the most express recommendation was made to Admiral Morard de Galle to avoid any engagement, even with inferior forces. After completing his mission, the admiral was to return to France, leaving only frigates at General Hoche's disposal. On December 16, the *Pégase* and the *Révolution* left the harbor. These two vessels immediately set sail to join the fleet at the Camaret anchorage. As soon as they were in sight, the commander-in-chief gave the order to sail. Rear Admiral Richery, who had his flag on the *Pégase*, took command of the light squadron.²⁷⁷

The expeditionary fleet consisted of seventeen vessels, thirteen frigates, corvettes, avisos, and ships armed en flûte, forming a total of forty-five vessels, carrying approximately seventeen thousand soldiers. Admiral Colpoys's squadron, cruising off Brest, had been sighted on the 16th, west of Ushant. The winds, blowing fresh from the east to the southeast, were driving it northwest. If the expeditionary fleet was safe from the entrance by the early hours of the night, it only needed to sail between the west and the southwest for it to have no worries about Admiral Colpoys the next day at daybreak. The latter could learn, from his frigates, that a French squadron had left Brest, but he must have been unaware of the route it had taken, and consequently the direction in which it should be pursued. The admiral informed his captains that he intended, after having reached the open sea, to sail forty leagues in a westerly direction. Having covered this distance, the army would come to starboard to reconnoitre Cape Mizen-Head. Only contrary winds, unforeseen circumstances or new information on the position of the English could, the admiral told his captains, modify this determination. In order to increase his chances of avoiding the enemy, which was the first condition for success, Morard de Galle decided to leave by the passage of the tidal wave. He warned the army of this by a signal. However, he gave Captain Durand Linois, commanding the *Nestor*, leader of the fleet, the order to continue his route through the Iroise, if, upon arriving at the entrance to the tidal wave, he did not find the winds favourable to take this passage.²⁷⁸

At three o'clock, the fleet was under sail. Shortly after, the convoy was signaled to form the line. The sun was about to set, and great confusion still reigned within the squadron. Few ships had managed to take up their positions. The weather was dark and squally, and the wind was increasing, blowing from the southeast. These considerations influenced the commander-in-chief. He saw all the difficulties presented by the exit through the tidal wave. Convinced that he no longer ran the risk of being seen by the enemy, since they were out of sight, and that, moreover, night was rapidly approaching, he wanted to spare his ships the dangers to which his initial decision exposed them. Accordingly, he gave the signal by cannon fire to run downwind. It was then five thirty in the evening. The *Fraternité* immediately set course for the new route. A corvette, the *Atalante*, was given the mission of going to the middle of the fleet to communicate, by signal or voice, the new orders of the commander-in-chief. Whether the signal given by the *Fraternité* had not been understood, or the weather was too dark for the change of course of the leading ships to be noticed, few ships followed the flagship frigate. At six thirty, the *Fraternité* joined the *Nestor*. Captain Durand Linois informed Morard de Galle that, yielding to the repeated requests of his pilot, who considered the exit by the tide as dangerous, he had entered the *Iroise*. Only a few ships had imitated his maneuver. The greater part of the army was heading towards the Raz de Sein. The passage through the Raz, with a strong easterly breeze, varying in a south-easterly direction, and dark and squally weather, was, for such an untrained squadron, a route full of perils.²⁷⁹

A disastrous event added to the difficulties of this situation. The seventy-four-strong ship, the *Séduisant*, touched down on the Grand Stévenec. The sea was rough, and the ship's position was immediately desperate. It covered itself with fire and fired cannons to call for help. These cannon shots and firings, combined with the signals made with fire and cannon fire by the repeater ships, increased the disorder reigning in the squadron. Shortly after, cannon shots were fired in the opposite direction. These were fired by an English frigate which, around 7:30 p.m., was a short distance from the ships leaving the *Iroise*. Frigates belonging to the blockade squadron were usually stationed at the entrance to Brest. Admiral Morard de Galle had these ships chased off on the 15th by a ship and five frigates, in order to hide from the enemy the movements of the French fleet which he was leading, the same day, to the anchorage of Camaret. But, on the 16th, two English frigates had returned near Ushant. As soon as they saw our ships under sail, one of them detached itself to bring this news to its admiral, and the second, the razed ship *Indefatigable*, continued to observe us. Under cover of night, which comes very quickly in December, in this latitude, its commander, Sir Edward Pelew, approached our ships without being recognized. Using a war ruse as bold as it was intelligent, he had cannons fired, lights hoisted and rockets launched to disturb the progress of our squadron, surprised by signals whose meaning it did not understand.²⁸⁰

When the English frigate saw several ships off the Sein causeway, it moved away. Sir Edward Pelew headed for an English port to inform the British Admiralty of our departure.

As a result of the various incidents we have just reported, the expeditionary fleet found itself, a few hours after setting sail, completely dispersed. Admiral Morard de Galle's determination at nightfall to leave via the Iroise River was one of the main causes of this outcome. With a solid squadron, with good crews and experienced staff, the admiral could have changed his initial orders without any difficulty. He forgot that he was not in command of a squadron, in the sense that the word implies. The captains were no happier than the admiral, and the ships they commanded were not warships. A ship with cannons and loaded with the first available men until a certain number, called the standard complement, is not a warship. It is absolutely incapable of competing with another ship of the same nominal strength, armed by the methods used among maritime nations. With the exception of the *Pégase* and the *Révolution*, which came from the sea, and perhaps two or three other ships, which had retained some of their original armament, in 1794, the maritime and military value of this fleet was nil.²⁸¹

Since Admiral Truguet's arrival in the ministry, more attention was paid than under the previous regime to the selection of officers to command naval vessels. Durand Linois, Bedout, Moncousu, former captains of the *Formidable*, *Tigre*, and *Redoutable*, who had participated in the Battle of Groix Island, and Lacrosse, who distinguished himself during this campaign by the battle he fought with his ship, the *Droits-de-l'Homme*, against two enemy vessels, were among the captains. While, by choosing those who had proven themselves during this war, a few men with the necessary qualities to command vessels had been found, it had not been possible to assemble a sufficient number of officers to form the general staff of such a large fleet. The government had decided that the ships and frigates would carry the landing force. Any warship on which there are transient troops loses its value. Experience has long shown that this system should be proscribed. However, in this circumstance, it could not be considered bad that it had been adopted. Reaching Ireland without being noticed was, for our fleet, the first condition of success. It was therefore very advantageous for it to have only a small number of ships. The ships that were part of the expedition were seventy-four guns. They had a crew of six hundred and fifty to seven hundred men. If, to this figure, we add six hundred soldiers, we arrive at a total of twelve to thirteen hundred men per ship. This congestion made the handling of the ships more difficult. The admiral lost sight of this situation when, going back on his first decision, he wanted to reach the open sea via the Iroise.²⁸²

II

The *Immortalité*, flying the flag of Admiral Bouvet, had left the Raz de Sein. At daybreak on the 17th, this frigate found itself completely isolated. In the morning, a few ships were sighted. Shortly after, the *Immortalité* joined the ships *Indomptable*, *Droits-de-l'Homme*, *Constitution*, *Trajan*, *Patriote*, *Tourville*, *Eole*, *Cassard*, the razed ship *Scevola*, the frigates *Tartu*, *Coquille*, *Bellone*, *Sirène*, *Impatiente*, *Charente*, and a transport. All these ships ranged under the flag of Admiral Bouvet. This one, to comply with the orders of Admiral Morard de Galle, had to reconnoitre Mizen-Head. Wanting to get away from the English cruises, the admiral ran to the west during the day of the 17th and that of the 18th. On the 19th, having arrived at the meridian of the cape in sight of which he was ordered to cruise, he headed north. The same day, the frigates detached ahead to scout the progress of the squadron reported several sails. The ships sighted were the vessels, the *Pégase*, on which Rear-Admiral Richery had his flag, the *Révolution*, *Fougueux*, *Mucius*, *Pluton*, *Wattignies*, *Redoutable*, the frigates the *Résolue*, on board which was Rear-Admiral Nielly, the *Bravoure*, four avisos and transports. Admiral Bouvet, by virtue of his seniority, took command of the assembled ships.²⁸³

Circumstances placed under his command fifteen ships, one razed ship, ten frigates, four avisos, and five transports. If we exclude the ship *Séduisant*, which had been lost in the Tread of Sein, the only vessels that had not yet joined the main body of the fleet by December 19 were the ship *Nestor*, three frigates, the *Romaine*, the *Cocarde*, and the *Fraternité*, two corvettes, the *Atalante* and the *Mutine*, and a transport. The fleet continued to make full sail to reach the Irish coast, from which it was forty leagues distant. The 20th was very foggy. The next day, at daybreak, the frigates signaled land.

The squadron had, which was very regrettable, landed a little to leeward. Dursey Island and Mizenhead were recognized. The winds, which had passed to the southwest, shortly after leaving Brest, had returned to the east. On the 21st, they blew fresh and the weather took on a bad appearance. Admiral Bouvet had no special instructions for the case that arose. But finding himself in sight of Bantry Bay, with almost the whole fleet, he resolved to lead the army to anchor. The order was given to hold to the wind and prepare to drop anchor. The pilots approached without suspicion the squadron, which they believed to be English. They were stopped and led onto our ships. At the moment when we arrived abeam of the entrance, the wind increased. The weather was cold and snow was falling. Our crews, composed largely of conscripts, weak, poorly dressed, confused with the passenger soldiers, did not maneuver with the vigor that the circumstances demanded. On the 22nd, at the end of the day, the squadron, after having tacked for more than twenty-four hours, had gained little.²⁸⁴

The weather continued to look bad. The pilots, fearing a gale, insisted that the squadron not remain under sail. The admiral anchored his frigate near Bear Island, in thirty-five fathoms of water. Fearing that several ships, which were still distant, were in too deep a water to drop anchor, he left each captain free to act as he deemed appropriate for the safety of his ship. Eight vessels, six frigates or corvettes, and a transport imitated the *Immortalité's* maneuver. The other ships put to sea.

On the 23rd, the weather was very bad, and the ships remained at anchor. On the 24th, the breeze died down. A council of war was held on board the frigate *Immortalité*, on which was General Grouchy, whose seniority, in the absence of Hoche, called him to command the fleet. The landing was decided upon. None of the ships which had put to sea on the 22nd having reappeared, the total number of troops present in the harbor was six thousand men with a few cannons. Here are the terms in which Rear-Admiral Bouvet recorded the events of the morning of December 24 in his journal: "I had various vessels set sail," wrote the admiral, "which were very far apart. Having absolutely no knowledge of the rest of the army and wanting to take a position in the present circumstances, which were becoming more critical every moment, I urged General Grouchy, commanding the landing troops, in the absence of General Hoche, to consult with the other general land officers and finally determine whether we would attempt the descent with the few men who remained, or whether we would leave the bay to go in search of the fleet."²⁸⁵

I had learned, moreover, from the Irish pilots, whom I had on board, that there were, in Cork, six English frigates, and I had to presume that at the time of our appearance, on the coast, these frigates had been sent from England or for the enemy fleet. These generals having decided that this descent would be attempted, I immediately gave the signal to sail with the greatest speed to the rest of the vessels, and I added that of forcing sail to try to take the anchorage designated in the plan. “At ten o'clock, the squadron set sail. The lugger, the *Affronteur*, on board which was an aide-de-camp of Admiral Bouvet, was given the mission of searching, on the northern coast, for some harbor sufficiently sheltered from the current winds for several boats to land there at once, in complete safety. At four o'clock in the evening, the admiral, after exchanging signals with this vessel, informed the army that the troops would be put ashore in a cove located to the north-quarter-northeast of the position his frigate occupied at that moment. The *Immortalité* anchored, at five o'clock, to the south and a little to the east of Bear Island, in thirty-one fathoms of water. The other ships dropped anchor as close as possible to the point indicated for landing. The weather was very bad during the night of the 24th. On the 25th, in the morning, the breeze increased, and soon after it blew in a gale. All communication between the ships was interrupted. Several ships drove off. One of the cables of the ship the *Droits-de-l'Homme* broke. At four thirty in the evening, the *Pluton*, lying on the coast, cut its cables and set sail. Around five o'clock, one of the cables of the *Immortalité* broke.²⁸⁶

The frigate responded to the first mate's call, but the anchor would not hold. The winds and the sea drove the *Immortalité* onto Bear Island, where it would have been lost, body and soul. The admiral decided to put to sea. The cable was cut, and the *Immortalité* headed out to sea. The admiral gave the signal to sail with cannon fire, and repeated this order by voice to the ships he passed. None of the ships anchored in the bay imitated the *Immortalité's* maneuver. Some captains did not understand the admiral's signals; others shrank from the loss of their anchors, which would have been the consequence of an immediate departure. During the night, several vessels were on the hunt. One of them, the *Indomptable*, had three anchors at sea, and on each of them, a hundred fathoms of cable.

On the 26th, in the morning, the wind, which continued to blow violently, did not allow any thought of landing. In the afternoon, the weather improved. The commander of the *Indomptable*, Division Chief Bedout, replaced Admiral Bouvet by virtue of his seniority. He ordered all the vessels to weigh anchors except one and to be ready to sail, either to put to sea or to approach land. On the 27th, in the morning, the wind dropped. The general officers of the land troops, meeting in council, decided that the descent could not be carried out. The number of soldiers at their disposal did not exceed four thousand. Finally, we had neither cannons, nor money, nor food, nor ammunition. Division Chief Bedout says in his journal: "On the 27th, at nine o'clock in the morning, the wind having calmed, the ships communicated with me."²⁸⁷

The general officers of the troops held a council. The result was that, with four thousand men, destitute of everything, without guns, food, money, or ammunition, they could not make the descent. Around noon, the winds shifted to the south, then to the southwest, and the weather took on a bad appearance. Commander Bedout, seeing the situation as very perilous with a gale coming from that direction, put out to sea followed by all the ships that were in the bay. He first thought of heading for the second rendezvous point, the entrance to the Shannon River. But the winds were blowing very fresh from the southwest, and he feared, as he said in his journal, "to be stranded on this coast with ships without anchors." Division Commander Bedout headed for Brest, where he anchored on the 12th with the ships *Indomptable*, which he commanded, *Wattignies*, *Eole*, *Cassard*, *Patriote*, *Constitution*, frigates *Coquille*, *Atalante*, and luggers *Vautour* and *Affronteur*.

The *Mucius* entered Brest the same day. This vessel was one of the vessels that had anchored in Bantry Bay on December 22. Having hunted during the night, it was in danger of getting lost. The captain of the *Mucius* had cut its cable and set sail. After having sailed offshore for a few days, without encountering any fleet vessels, he returned to Brest. Four ships of the expedition had preceded, in the harbor, the ships which had followed the division leader Bedout. These were the *Pluton*, *Pégase*, *Résolue* and *Immortalité*. It will be remembered that the *Pluton* had left Bantry Bay on December 25, cutting its cable. This vessel, which was in very poor condition, was taking on a lot of water.²⁸⁸

Damage occurring during the bad weather worsened this situation. The captain called a council of his officers; a return to Brest was decided. The *Résolue*, flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Nielly, was, on December 22, some distance astern of the *Immortalité*, when the latter frigate anchored in Bantry Bay. The *Résolue*, wanting to turn east, continued to tack. Around ten o'clock in the evening, she was running, her tacks to port, with her lights on, when a vessel was sighted forward. It was the *Redoutable* coming alongside. The short distance between the two vessels made collision inevitable. The *Résolue* was almost completely dismasted; it retained only its mainmast without a yard. This frigate dropped three anchors, then worked on making a makeshift mast. When the gale of December 25th came, the *Résolue* set sail, cutting its cables. Taking into consideration the state in which this frigate was, Rear-Admiral Nielly gave the order to sail for Brest. A few days later, the *Résolue* encountered the vessel *Pégase*, which took it in tow. The *Pégase*, which was flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Richery, had been unable to anchor in Bantry Bay on December 22nd. Left at sea, it had suffered serious damage. This ship, which had just completed a very difficult campaign in Newfoundland, was in very poor condition. Rear Admiral Richery, believing that the *Pégase* could no longer safely sail, had headed for Brest.

The *Immortalité*, which had left Bantry Bay at five o'clock in the evening on December 25, had cut its cables and remained at sea for three days.²⁸⁹

On the 29th, the breeze dropped and turned west. The *Immortalité* could have returned very quickly to Bantry Bay. However, this frigate headed for Brest. Rear-Admiral Bouvet explained, as follows in his journal, the grave decision he was making: "The wind settling in this direction (from the west) and not expecting to encounter the separated vessels again on the 23rd, nor those that were with me in Bantry Bay; being, moreover, on the fourth day of cruising and nearly sixty leagues southwest of Cape Misen-Head; I had only about eighteen days' worth of biscuit left; unable to make any more bread due to the demolition of the oven; Finding myself with only one anchor, the one in the hold not being able to be removed without demolishing the boat, and a bad cable and the remains of those that had been cut, I do not believe I should, in the critical circumstances in which I find myself, return to Bantry Bay where I would certainly not find any of our vessels. The same reasons apply for the rendezvous at the River Shannon where the winds from the south to the west - northwest by the west beat on the coast as in the previous bay. All these considerations determine me to return to Brest. I therefore order the captain of the frigate to head for this port.

We have reported what happened to the vessels the *Indomptable*, *Wattignies*, *Eole*, *Cassard*, *Patriote*, *Mucius*, *Pégase* and *Pluton*. It remains for us to speak of the ships *Tourville*, *Fougueux*, *Redoutable*, *Nestor*, *Trajan*, *Droits-de-l'Homme*, *Révolution* and *Constitution* and of some frigates, at the head of which we must place *Fraternité* on which were Vice-Admiral Morard de Galle and General Hoche.²⁹⁰

The *Tourville* and the *Fouqueux* had been unable to anchor off Great Bear Island on December 22, as the *Immortalité* and a few other vessels had done. Driven out to sea by the easterly winds, these two vessels headed for Bantry Bay as soon as the weather became favorable. They arrived there, the *Tourville* on December 30, and the *Fouqueux* on the 31st. The *Redoutable*, in its collision with the *Résolue* on December 22, at ten o'clock in the evening, had suffered serious damage. This vessel, after repairing itself at sea, headed for Bantry Bay where it dropped anchor on the 30th. Several frigates, including the *Cocarde*, commanded by Division Commander Daugier, were in the harbor. The *Surveillante*, completely untied and taking on a lot of water, was in a worrying situation. The captains of the vessels *Fouqueux*, *Tourville*, *Redoutable*, and the frigates *Surveillante* and *Romaine*, meeting in council on board the *Cocarde*, under the chairmanship of Commander Daugier, unanimously decided that the *Surveillante* should be sunk and returned to France. This was the situation when, on January 1st, the *Nestor*, captained by Durand Linois, appeared at the entrance to the bay. During the night of the 20th to the 21st, this vessel, which had until then remained the faithful companion of the *Fraternité*, had separated from this frigate in a squall. As soon as the weather permitted, that is to say on the 25th, the *Nestor* set sail for Bantry Bay. Commander Durand Linois took, by virtue of his seniority, command of the ships which were in the bay. On January 2nd, he gathered on board Major General Lemoine, Brigadier Generals Watrin and Mermet, Adjutant Generals Evrard and Gatines and Division Chiefs Maistrail and Daugier.²⁹¹

The commander of the *Nestor*, after informing the council that four thousand men were available to carry out the landing, presented objections to the execution of this plan, recorded in his journal in the following terms: "1. the improbability of a larger force; 2. the risk of blockade by the winds and the enemy; 3. the lack of supplies that forced the ships to leave for Brest immediately after the troops disembarked; 4. General Hoche alone possessed the plans for the campaign; 5. the news of a camp of thirteen thousand men formed by the English to oppose the landing and the certainty of a squadron of six ships stationed at Cork." "After careful consideration of the situation, the council declared that there was no need to disembark the troops. To put to sea, cruise for two days at the bay, and make for Brest, if, after this time, there was no news of the army, such were the resolutions adopted by the general and senior officers assembled on board the *Nestor*. On January 3, a very strong south-southwest wind prevented them from setting sail. The next day, the *Nestor*, *Redoutable*, *Tourville*, *Fougueux*, *Cocarde*, *Romaine*, *Sirène*, *Fidèle* and the lugger *Renard* set sail. On the 5th, these vessels, sailing in good order, set sail for Brest, where they entered on January 13. The frigate the *Bellone* arrived there the same day. The *Trajan*, which had left Bantry Bay on December 27 with the division commander Bedout, had become separated from the ships it was sailing with. This vessel headed for the entrance to the River Shannon, the second rendezvous point assigned by Admiral Morard de Galle in his instructions.²⁹²

On the 28th, Commander Leray encountered the *Charente*. This frigate, which was about to run out of supplies, was returning to France. The *Trajan* and the *Charente* anchored in Kilkadia Bay. The ship provided supplies to the frigate. Brigade Commander Locht asked to be put ashore with the soldiers embarked on the *Trajan* and the *Charente*. He intended to join the expeditionary force, which he assumed was already inland off Ireland. Captain Leray, far from sharing this opinion, considered it highly unlikely that the troops had left our ships. Moreover, the food situation on board his ship did not allow him to remain on the coast. What would have been the fate of Brigade Commander Locht and his soldiers if the squadron had returned to France? The landing plan was abandoned. The *Trajan* put to sea again on January 2nd. On the 8th, it was chased by two ships and two frigates, whose pursuit it managed to elude. From the information he had obtained on the coast, Commander Leray knew that English forces were beginning to appear in these waters. Furthermore, he only had enough supplies for sixteen days. Finally, the *Trajan's* rigging and masting required the greatest precautions. Under these conditions, Commander Leray called a council of his officers. It was decided to return to Brest, where the *Trajan* anchored on January 14th.

On December 17, that is to say the day after the expeditionary fleet had set sail, the *Fraternité*, on which were General Hoche and Vice-Admiral Morard de Galle, was accompanied only by the *Nestor*.²⁹³

During the day, the *Cocarde* and the *Romaine* joined the *Fraternité*. On December 20, this frigate, which only had the *Nestor* with it, was very close to the fleet, and, if it hadn't been for the fog, which was very thick that day, the admiral and General Hoche would have seen almost all of the expedition's ships heading north to reconnoiter Mizen Head. During the night, the wind shifted to the east, resulting in dark and squally weather. The next morning, the *Nestor* was no longer in sight. On December 24, Admiral Morard de Galle's frigate was heading for Mizen Head when a vessel, appearing to be a ship of the line, was sighted. This ship having not responded to the recognition signals, hoisted on board the flagship frigate, the latter took chase to the west-north-west. The unknown vessel began to pursue it, making sail. "I gave the order," says Morard de Galle in his journal, "to successively set all sails. This maneuver took place very slowly, as much because of the dilapidated state of the rigging as because of the lack of intelligence and the clumsiness of the crew who dropped the reefs of the main topsail. This sail was torn." If things were happening like this on the flagship frigate, what must have been the situation of the other vessels of the army from the crews' point of view? The unknown vessel approaching the *Fraternité*, the admiral had the guns of the forecastle battery and a boat thrown into the sea. When the French ship had been lightened, its speed became almost equal to that of its adversary. The *Fraternité* made several false turns during the night. The next day, at daybreak, not a sail was in sight. The *Fraternité* resumed its course towards the coast of Ireland. But the easterly gale, which was driving our ships off the coast of Bantry Bay, came to attack it and drive it out to sea.²⁹⁴

On the 28th, the wind having eased and shifted to the west, the admiral steered back over land. The two commanders-in-chief, whose cruel situation is easily understood, were beginning to hope that the end of their anxieties was near. Reasoning based on the weather the *Fraternité* had had, and assuming, on the other hand, that the squadron had not lost ground, as had happened to the *Fraternité*, following its unexpected encounter with an enemy ship, General Hoche and Admiral Morard de Galle expected to find almost all the ships gathered in Bantry Bay. On December 29, two ships were sighted. These were the *Révolution* and the *Scevola*. The admiral approached these ships, which were not obeying the rallying signal floating from the masts of the *Fraternité*. The *Révolution* and the *Scevola* were broken down. The first of these ships had boats at sea to save the crew of the second, which was sinking. The *Fraternité*, coming to the aid of the *Révolution*, took some of the sailors and soldiers carried by the *Scevola*. The admiral learned that the *Révolution*, being at anchor on December 22 in Bantry Bay, had been boarded by the *Constitution*. The *Révolution*, obliged to cut its cable to avoid serious damage, had set sail. This vessel was heading towards the coast of Ireland when it encountered the *Scevola*. Its bowsprit was cracked and it had only one anchor and one cable left. Finally, with the additional men from the *Scevola*, the *Révolution* had only ten days of food left. The *Fraternité*, accompanied by this ship, resumed its course towards Ireland.²⁹⁵

On December 31, that is, two days later, the commander of the *Révolution*, Captain Dumanoir Lepelley, wrote to the admiral to express his concerns about the situation of his ship. If a gale broke, the breaking of the bowsprit would expose the *Révolution* to the most serious damage. This ship carried 2,200 men. The result was congestion as harmful for maneuvering as for combat. Finally, the *Révolution* only had enough provisions for eight days. Thus, these two ships, one with 2,200 men, and the other, the *Fraternité*, 800, were exposed to the double risk of encountering the enemy in superior numbers and finding themselves, without provisions, in the middle of winter, in the vicinity of Ireland. The order was given to sail towards our coast. However, it was not towards a French port, but towards Bantry Bay that they should have headed. The admiral knew that the ships of the expedition, beaten by the east winds which had blown in a storm, had been driven to the west. But on the other hand, the winds having passed to the west, these same ships had, at that moment, to return towards the coasts of Ireland. The presence of the admiral and the general was indispensable to save the captains from the indecision in which they were going to find themselves. Such were the reflections that the two commanders-in-chief could not fail to make. It must be believed that they yielded to an imperative necessity, when they decided to set a course for our coasts. Both shrank from the prospect of either running out of food or seeing, if a gale came, the *Révolution* being swallowed up with the 2,200 men it carried.²⁹⁶

Admiral Morard de Galle informed the minister, in the following terms, of the reasons that led him to make this decision. "The account given to me by Commander Dumanoir Lepelley of the position of the part of the army that had anchored in Bantry Bay; the signal to prepare to set sail and the very bad weather that had prevailed led him to believe that the ships had set sail and had not been able to do so without losing anchors; the situation of the ship *La Révolution* and the near certainty that none of the ships lacking anchors would have returned to Bantry Bay; on the other hand, the small quantity of provisions remaining for the troops, and some ships being provided with only six weeks or two months' worth of supplies for the crews; All these distressing circumstances have determined me, after having taken the advice of General Hoche, to make way for returning to Brest, not being able to let the *Révolution* make its way alone, without exposing it greatly, if its bowsprit is missing " The *Fraternité* took one hundred men from the *Révolution* in order to reduce the consumption of provisions on this ship. On board the two ships, the daily ration was reduced. After having been forced to change course several times to escape the English cruisers, Admiral Morard de Galle anchored, on January 13, in the harbor of the island of Aix with the *Révolution* and the *Fraternité*. Although, for several days, the crews had only been given a small part of the regulation ration, the ship and the frigate had, on their arrival, only four days of provisions. The *Révolution* had its rigging and sails in the worst condition; the bowsprit was broken and the foremast cracked.²⁹⁷

The commander of the arms at Rochefort, Admiral Martin, wrote to the minister: "The *Révolution* currently has two thousand one hundred men on board and only four days' worth of provisions left when it anchored. This ship has a broken bowsprit, a useless foremast, no sails, and the rigging is in the worst condition." We will add that the *Révolution*, which arrived in Brest on December 11 with Richery's division, left on the 16th without having undergone any repairs, although it was in dire need of them. This ship had been taken as it was without taking its situation into account.

III

By January 14, fifteen vessels, ten frigates, five corvettes or avisos, and three transports had returned to France. The expeditionary fleet numbered forty-five vessels on the 16th, the day it left Camaret harbor. What was the fate of the twelve vessels that had not yet reappeared? We know the unfortunate end of the seventy-four-strong vessel, the *Séduisant*, and the razed vessel, the *Scevola*. The frigate *Impatiente* was lost near Cape Clear in foggy weather. The crew and passengers, with the exception of seven men, were killed in this shipwreck. The *Surveillante*, attached to the expeditionary fleet, although in very poor condition, was sunk in Bantry Bay, as seen above. The frigate *Tartu*, the corvette *Atalante* and four transports had fallen into the hands of the English.²⁹⁸

Finally, a transport had sunk in the open sea. We now only have to speak of one vessel, the *Droits-de-l'Homme*, Captain Lacrosse. This vessel had set sail from Bantry Bay during the gale of December 25. When the weather permitted it to sail, it headed for the mouth of the Shannon, where it assumed the expedition's ships would meet. On January 5, after cruising for eight days in sight of Cape Loops, Captain Lacrosse, having had no news from the fleet, decided to return to France. He headed for Belle-Isle. On the morning of January 13, the weather was overcast. The position of the vessel, which had not been observed for several days, was uncertain. The commander estimated that he was twenty-five leagues from land, in the latitude of the Penmarks. Wanting to wait for a favorable moment to land, while keeping out of the enemy's cruises, he ran south, under small sails. In the afternoon, a vessel was sighted on the starboard side, that is to say, to windward. Shortly after, a second vessel was reported sailing in the waters of the first. Commander Lacrosse made sail and steered to the southeast in order to get away from these suspicious sails. They were difficult to distinguish through the fog, but they presented the appearance of large vessels. Before the end of the day, two new sails were reported. One of these was the razed ship *Indefatigable*, of forty-four, Captain Sir Edward Pelew, and the other, the frigate of thirty, *Amazon*, Captain Robert Reynolds. The two English ships maneuvered to cut off the route of the French vessel. Commander Lacrosse supposed that these frigates belonged to the same division as the ships sighted a few hours before.²⁹⁹

Consequently, he continued to run under full sail, to diminish the number of his adversaries, in case he failed to thwart their progress. Around 4:30, with the wind blowing fresh, from the west-northwest, varying to the west-southwest, the ship lost both topmasts. This damage, occurring at such a time, was an extremely serious event. The fall of the two topmasts was not the result of carelessness. The *Indefatigable*, which was a few miles away, carried more sail than the *Droits-de-l'Homme*. It must therefore be assumed that this vessel had been sent to sea with its masts installed in insufficient conditions. The *Indefatigable* did not attempt to take advantage of the position of the French ship, by placing herself to leeward and cannonading her, while the mass of sail and the debris of masts which encumbered this side would not have allowed her to use her artillery. This frigate, which was under full sail, took in her sails and took reefs in her topsails. When she was under sail easy to maneuver and fight, she continued on her way. The *Amazone*, seven or eight miles distant, was advancing rapidly. The ship, after having got rid of the masts, yards and rigging which were dragging along the side, headed towards the land, under her lower sails and the topgallant, with a speed of five knots per hour. In any other circumstances, Commander Lacrosse would have contemplated with great calm the prospect of an engagement with the *Indefatigable* and the *Amazone*. But he feared, at any moment, that ships belonging to the English divisions cruising on our coasts might appear on the horizon. He therefore considered it his duty to avoid any encounter that might delay his march.³⁰⁰

The battle having become inevitable, he prepared to sustain it with the greatest energy. At 5:30, the *Indefatigable* arrived within hailing distance of the *Droits-de-l'Homme*. Suddenly turning to starboard, she fired her broadside. The latter, imitating this maneuver, presented a broadside to his adversary and immediately returned his fire. From the very beginning of the action, the apparent disproportion of strength between a seventy-four-gun ship and a forty-four-gun frigate disappeared. The state of the sea, the amplitude of the rolling, the low height of the lower battery, about thirty-five centimeters lower than on ships of the same rank, did not allow the ship the *Droits-de-l'Homme* to use its thirty-six guns. The *Indefatigable* was a powerfully armed ship, carrying twenty-six twenty-four pound guns in its battery, and, on the forecastle, eighteen forty-two pound carronades. A little before seven o'clock, the *Amazone*, having arrived within cannon range, opened fire on the *Droits-de-l'Homme*. Around seven thirty, the two frigates moved away to repeat maneuvers. The French ship took advantage of this respite to consolidate its mast sections and repair the disorder that an eighteen gun, placed on the quarterdeck to fire in retreat, had caused by bursting. At eight thirty minutes, the fight resumed with renewed vigor. The two frigates, passing one after the other over the ship's bow, sent it broadsides. There were, on the *Droits-de-l'Homme*, in addition to the crew of six hundred and fifty men, nearly six hundred passenger soldiers. The presence of this large number of personnel made it possible to maintain a very lively fire.³⁰¹

Commander Lacrosse repeatedly forced his opponents to present their aft positions and receive all his fire in that position. But the lack of skill of our gunners rendered broadsides that should have been disastrous for the English frigates virtually harmless. At ten thirty, the ship's mizzenmast, cut by cannonballs, fell into the sea. At that moment, the frigates allowed themselves to be driven astern. After an hour, spent repairing their damage and securing their masts, they positioned themselves aft of the ship and cannonaded it from the quarter. Around two o'clock in the morning, Commander Lacrosse, wounded in the knee, was taken to the post. His second in command, Frigate Captain Prévost Lacroix, replaced him. "This brave officer," wrote Commander Lacrosse, "continued the fight with the same warmth with which I had begun it." The action continued on both sides with extreme vivacity when, around six o'clock in the morning, the land rose up menacingly on the front of the three ships. In the heat of the fight, the captains had not been concerned with the position of their ships. Faced with the imminence of the danger, the firing ceased. The situation of the *Droits-de-l'Homme* is well known. The English frigates, without having suffered as much as the French ship, were nevertheless in very poor condition. They both had four feet of water in the hold and serious damage to their masts. The losses in men were very low, especially compared to ours. The *Indefatigable* had seven wounded, including an officer, and twelve men with bruises. The *Amazon* had three killed and fifteen wounded. The number of killed, on the *Droits-de-l'Homme*, was one hundred and that of wounded one hundred and fifty.³⁰²

Three officers of the French Legion were among the dead. Seven naval officers and several army officers were among the wounded. The crew of the *Droits-de-l'Homme* had fought valiantly. The general staff, in the words of Commander Lacrosse, "had made up for the lacking resources with their intelligence and courage." The honor of the defense did not belong only to the sailors. It was shared by the officers and soldiers who were passengers, to whom Generals Humbert, Régnier, and Corbineau had set an example of bravery and devotion.

A new danger, perhaps greater than the one to which they had just been exposed, threatened the three ships. The wind, which was blowing from the west in a strong breeze, and the sea were driving them to the coast. It was by the dubious light of the moon, which had appeared for a moment, that the somewhat vague outlines of the land had been seen. No point could yet be distinguished, and Commander Lacrosse, who had been carried on deck, did not know where he was. The three ships held the wind, the ship and the *Indefatigable* on the starboard tacks, and the *Amazone* on the port tacks. In the state in which her masts were, the ship the *Droits-de-l'Homme* was attempting an impossible struggle against the elements. The mainmast, the foremast, the bowsprit, the only ones she still had, were pierced by the cannonballs. The ship was hardly abeam when the bowsprit and foremast fell into the sea. The ship, with only its mainsail remaining, pierced by cannonballs and torn by the wind, drifted rapidly towards the shore. Two anchors had been lost in Bantry Bay and the cables of those on the davits had been cut by cannonballs.³⁰³

A small anchor, set in twelve fathoms, did not hold. The ship, after striking from the stern, came across. At the first tug of the heel, the mainmast fell along the side. The anchor line, which was at the bottom, was cut, and the ship swerved forward toward the shore. Cannons were thrown into the sea to relieve the ship, which they tried to keep upright. Day broke, a gray day on the Brittany coast in the month of January, illuminating the position of the three combatants with its dark hues. The ship, stripped of all its masts, was stranded in Audierne Bay, on a sandbank, near the village of Plouzenet. The *Amazon* was on the coast, to the north of the *Droits-de-l'Homme*, about two miles away. The *Indefatigable*, which could be seen to the south, a mile away, was racing, under a few shreds of sail, with her tacks to starboard, trying to overtake the Penmarcks. If this frigate, doubting the success of this enterprise, took the northern tack, the fate of her convict was probably reserved for her. By persisting in passing to windward of the Penmarcks, she exposed herself to being thrown onto this reef. If this hypothesis came true, none of those who were on board would escape death. The crew of the *Indefatigable* escaped this ordeal safe. The English frigate doubled, very close to it, this formidable line of rocks. The wind, increasing in violence, made the position of the French vessel, which was stranded far from land, very critical. Between this unfortunate building and the beach, the waves, breaking furiously, formed only a breakers. The stern of the *Droits-de-l'Homme*, pierced by the cannonballs, smashed by the waves, opened a free passage to the sea water. The hold was flooded.³⁰⁴

This unfortunate vessel had run out of fresh water and was almost without provisions. The crew of the *Amazone* had better fortune; they reached the coast a few hours after running aground. Six men, who had imprudently thrown themselves into a lifeboat, were the only ones missing. The 14th passed without the ship *Droits-de-l'Homme* being able to communicate with land. On the 15th, some men reached the coast on rough seas; others perished in the attempt. The same day, the large lifeboat reached the beach. On the 16th, it was decided to launch the longboat. Wounded men, as well as women and children, from the merchant ships captured by the *Droits-de-l'Homme*, were placed in this boat, while it was still suspended along the side. As soon as a favorable moment presented itself, the order was given to bring the boat in. Hardly had it touched the sea when, despite the most energetic efforts of the naval officers and the officers of the Legion of the Franks, a large number of men, about sixty or eighty, threw themselves into this boat. A wave lifted the boat and brought it violently against the ship. The boat was broken and everything it carried disappeared; barely a few men managed to get back on board. Lieutenant Chatelin, Ensigns Joubert and Muller, and Boatswain Tonnerre were killed in this fatal circumstance. The westerly winds, which were still blowing very fresh, did not allow the ship to be rescued. During the night of January 16, the winds shifted to the east. On the 17th, five fishing boats, coming from Audierne, took on the wounded and one hundred men. Two hundred and fifty sailors or soldiers embarked on the cutter *l'Aiguille*.³⁰⁵

Remaining aboard the *Droits-de-l'Homme* were, in addition to Commander Lacrosse, Frigate Captain Prévost-Lacroix, Ensign Helone, Naval Artillery Captain Bourlot, and four hundred men, petty officers, army non-commissioned officers, sailors, and soldiers. All were exhausted from fatigue and need. Twenty bottles of water, left by the cutter *l'Aiguille*, saved the lives of Commander Lacrosse and a few unfortunates who had fainted. The night was very cold. The men, who had been wearing wet clothes for several days, suffered cruelly. Many of them were gripped by a burning fever. Delirium seized these unfortunates. Sixty men died in convulsions.

On the morning of the 18th, the survivors of the terrible scenes we have just recounted embarked on the cutter *l'Aiguille* and the gunboat *l'Arrogante*. By one o'clock in the afternoon, there was no one left on board the ship *les Droits-de-l'Homme*. Frigate Captain Prévost-Lacroix was the last to leave, after having the dead thrown into the sea. "As a man," wrote Commander Lacrosse, "I gave consolation to my crew; as a captain, I fulfilled my duty by never abandoning it. Some were transported to Audierne and the rest followed me to Brest where I arrived on the cutter *l'Aiguille*." Of the thirteen hundred and fifty men, including fifty prisoners, who were on this ship, four hundred had perished. Commander Lacrosse called upon the government's goodwill for his officers, and principally for Frigate Captain Prévost-Lacroix, Lieutenants Descormiers and Seguin, Ensigns Hellouin, Gouin, Panisson and Léance, and Midshipman Bastide.³⁰⁶

The Directory appointed the brave Commander Lacrosse as Rear Admiral.

The English, prisoners aboard the *Droits-de-l'Homme*, had behaved very well during the ship's sinking. Two merchant captains had set an example of courage and devotion. The first had thrown himself into the sea fourteen times to bring to shore men who were about to drown. The second, with the help of his sailors, had built rafts on which a number of soldiers had managed to reach land. The government freed all the prisoners and sent them back to their country on a parliamentary boat. The two captains also received a monetary gratuity.

The battle of the *Droits-de-l'Homme* and the sinking of this ship, in the dramatic circumstances we have just reported, were the last episodes of the Irish expedition. Two ships, the *Séduisant* and the *Droits-de-l'Homme*, the razed ship the *Scevola*, three frigates, the *Impatiente*, the *Surveillante*, the *Tartu*, the corvette the *Atalante* and five transports, that is to say twelve ships, sunk in the open sea, thrown ashore or captured by the English, such was, for the navy, as far as equipment was concerned, the result of this operation. The personnel losses were as follows: fifteen hundred men drowned on the *Séduisant*, the *Droits-de-l'Homme* and the *Impatiente*. There were one hundred killed and one hundred and fifty wounded on the *Droits-de-l'Homme*.³⁰⁷

The capture of the *Tartu*, the *Atalante*, and several transports, along with the loss of the *Sémillante* off Cape Clear, caused 3,300 men, sailors and soldiers, to fall into enemy hands. The *Amazon* was lost, its crew taken prisoner, six men from that frigate drowned during the sinking, three killed, twenty-two wounded, and twelve men from the two frigates bruised during the battle, and a few captured merchant ships were the only compensation that fortune granted us for so much misfortune. Shortly after their arrival in Brest, the troops embarked on Admiral Morard de Galle's ships received orders to head inland. The government intended to continue its plans to land on the coast of Great Britain. Before their departure, Hoche's soldiers learned, through a proclamation from their general, that the execution of this campaign plan was only postponed. The Minister of the Navy remained devoted to this enterprise. He ordered that the Brest squadron be put to sea as quickly as possible.

IV

We must examine the navy's share in the failure of this enterprise. The commander-in-chief of the expeditionary fleet was to put to sea with forty-five ships, while Admiral Colpoys blockaded Brest at the head of a strong squadron. This difficulty, the first to arise, was skillfully resolved.³⁰⁸

Admiral Morard de Galle put out to sea on the night of December 16, while Admiral Colpoys, who was thirty-five or forty miles west-northwest of Ushant, was struggling in vain against the easterly to southeasterly winds to get closer to land. Unfortunately, this was where Admiral Morard de Galle's role ended. The *Fraternité*, after sailing for a few days in the company of several ships, found itself alone on December 21. On the 22nd, to avoid an unequal battle, it was forced to head west with strong easterly winds, moving away from Bantry Bay and thus losing precious time. A few days later, the *Fraternité* approached the coast of Ireland, but it was to witness the spectacle of the *Révolution* hastily transferring the crew and passengers of the sinking *Scevola*. On December 30, General Hoche and Admiral Morard de Galle ordered a course for our coast. They returned to France, barely twenty-four hours away from Bantry Bay, because the *Fraternité*, on which they were, and the ship *La Révolution* were, fourteen days after their departure from Brest, on the point of running out of provisions. The isolation in which the frigate *La Fraternité*, which carried General Hoche and Admiral Morard de Galle, found itself was one of the most unfortunate incidents of this campaign. Public opinion was moved by the presence of the two commanders-in-chief on this vessel. The government felt it necessary to give an explanation on this subject. A note, worded as follows, appeared in the Official Journal of January 9, 1797: "On leaving the port of Brest, Admiral Morard de Galle and General Hoche, who could expect a fight with the English squadron, had boarded the frigate *La Fraternité*."³⁰⁹

In any case, the role of the two land and sea commanders ceased as soon as the fleet was under sail, and that of Admiral Bouvet, who probably did not seek such honor, began. This general officer, after rallying, on the morning of the 17th, the ships that were in sight of his frigate, made way so as to avoid the enemy.

On December 19, when he met Admirals Nielly and Richery, he found himself in command of all the expedition's ships, with the exception of one vessel and three frigates. So far, Admiral Bouvet's conduct cannot raise the slightest criticism. Dursey Island was the first land recognized by the ships united under his flag. The squadron had landed some distance to leeward of the entrance to Bantry Bay. The wind was blowing fresh from the east and the weather was squally. On the same day, the *Fraternité*, *Nestor*, *Cocarde* and *Romaine*, battling against the same breeze, were unable to approach land. The ships under Admiral Bouvet's command rose very little to windward. There is no reason to suppose that this unfortunate result can legitimately be attributed either to poor direction on the part of the admiral or to the willful negligence of the commanders. It is certain that the captains, charged with the command of ships offering so few resources from a maritime point of view, desired nothing more than to land the troops they carried. They were, consequently, particularly interested in the squadron's arrival as quickly as possible in Bantry Bay. On the other hand, one could only go upwind if one had to maneuver quickly and precisely, to tack, increase or decrease sails, or to change sails carried away by the wind.³¹⁰

A large number of men, unaccustomed to the sea, frozen with cold, remained stranded among the passing troops. A few rare sailors, along with the petty officers, bore the brunt of this rough voyage. This was a cause of delay for which the responsibility should fall not on the officers, but on those who had sent such poorly armed ships to sea. On the evening of the 22nd, the weather having become very bad, the *Immortalité* anchored, leaving each captain free to maneuver for the safety of his ship. On the 24th, the landing having been decided upon, all the ships set sail to enter the bay. Before the end of the day, the winds, which had remained in the east, having freshened, it was not possible to put the troops ashore. The squadron anchored again. On the 25th, in the evening, the *Immortalité* put to sea to avoid the danger of losing body and goods. After having sailed offshore for three days, the admiral headed directly for Brest. The lack of provisions was the reason he gave to explain his conduct. It cannot be considered sufficient. On December 29, it is the admiral himself who says it in his report, the *Immortalité* had eighteen days' worth of biscuit. She had, moreover, flour which she could not, it is true, use, since the oven was demolished. But on arriving in Bantry Bay, the *Immortalité* would have exchanged this flour for biscuit taken from a ship whose oven was in good condition. The *Immortalité* had only one anchor left. There was a second, but that one was the hold, and, at sea, said the admiral, it could not be lowered to the davit.³¹¹

In Bantry Bay, this operation would have been easily executed.

Admiral Bouvet despaired too soon of the expedition's success. The interests at stake demanded an effort he either did not know how or did not want to make. This is not to say that the return of the *Immortalité* to Bantry Bay would have had a great influence on events. Admiral Bouvet, arriving on December 30 or 31, would have found the *Redoutable*, *Tourville*, *Fougueux*, and a few frigates in the harbor. Twenty-four hours later, the *Nestor* would have increased the number of ships flying its flag. Now, the land and sea officers, gathered on board this vessel on January 2, had thought that it was imprudent, due to the small number of troops available, to make a landing. Four thousand men could have been put ashore. The arrival of the *Immortalité* would have added only two hundred and fifty soldiers to this figure. There is reason to believe that the decision of the council assembled by Commander Durand Linois would have been maintained. In this hypothesis, the question of provisions would have imposed itself on Admiral Bouvet as it had imposed itself on Commander Durand Linois, and the *Fraternité* would have set sail, as had the *Nestor* and the ships which followed this vessel to Brest. The return of the *Immortalité* to Bantry Bay would only have been significant if this frigate had been accompanied or followed, at short notice, by the ships with which it had been in Bantry Bay a few days earlier. It was the absence of these ships that definitively compromised the expedition. However, all the captains were in a position to return to the bay, since the winds had shifted to the west.³¹²

Now, some had headed for Brest, as if certain that the expedition had been abandoned, while others had reconnoitered Cape Loops. The latter, encountering no ship carrying orders, and forced to make a swift decision due to a lack of supplies, brought their ships back to France. The ship *Droits-de-l'Homme*, commanded by a brave, energetic officer determined to do his duty, remained for several days off the entrance to the River Shannon. The ship Trajan and the frigate *Charente* cruised in the same waters. According to the admiral's orders, every captain was required, in the event of separation, to cruise for a few days under Misenhead. Admiral Morard de Galle, passing this point, would have rallied the ships that had arrived there before him. If he had not met, under Misen-Head, all the ships separated from the army, he would have continued his route, leaving behind him a frigate to indicate to the latecomers the areas where they could join him. These instructions supposed, and one cannot be surprised, that the *Fraternité* would not cease for an instant to be accompanied by the greater part of the ships, if not by all. The inconveniences, resulting from the absence of the commander-in-chief during the first part of the expedition, had not had the opportunity to occur, since Admiral Bouvet had led the squadron into Bantry Bay. But, after the dispersal of the fleet, begun on December 22 and definitively completed on the 25th, each captain found himself without precise indications for the case which arose. We see then that the unfortunate consequences, arising from the absence of the *Fraternité*, could have been averted by Admiral Bouvet.³¹³

It was up to the latter, when he had the fortunate fortune to gather almost the entire fleet under his flag, to anticipate any further separation. Arriving at the mouth of Bantry Bay, he should have considered the unpleasant perplexities he would cause the captains if he did not arrange a rendezvous. This is what Admiral Morard de Galle would not have failed to do. It was clear that the time had come to decide on the point where the landing would take place. Admiral Bouvet could not fail to signal a rendezvous, whatever it might be, on December 22, while leaving each captain free to maneuver for the safety of his ship. In this circumstance, as well as during the gale of December 25th which drove several ships away and ran aground, he was under a strict obligation to say where he wanted to be gathered. Bantry Bay, which he had already entered with his frigate and a certain number of ships, was naturally indicated as the general rendezvous of the fleet. If Admiral Bouvet had taken this precaution, which was quite natural for a squadron leader, the westerly winds would have brought back, from December 31st to January 2nd, the ships that had the possibility or the will to return. Would the number of these ships have been sufficient for the landing to be decided? With a squadron so poorly armed and continually suffering damage, it is difficult to say. Whatever had happened, Admiral Bouvet would have been conscious of having done everything to ensure the success of this enterprise. This general officer forgot that, unforeseen circumstances having placed him at the head of the expeditionary fleet, he should only be inspired by the great interests placed in his hands.³¹⁴

Before concluding, we will recall the state of this fleet to which the Directory had not hesitated to entrust this difficult undertaking. Let us first take a look at the personnel. Admiral Morard de Galle, in Brest harbor, wanted to change the squadron's course; he was unable to do so. No one paid any attention to his signals; they did not even follow the leader of the fleet. The latter, moreover, only entered the Iroise at the request of his pilot and not as a result of the admiral's signals, which he did not understand. Disorder and confusion reigned in this squadron. Each captain, preoccupied with the difficulties presented by the sortie with a violent wind and such untrained crews, thought only of his ship. All unity, all cohesion, disappeared. The ships of the expedition gained the open sea, but they left behind them a vessel, the *Séduisant*, which was lost on the great Stévenec. At the entrance to Bantry Bay, the *Résolue* lost all its masts in a collision with the *Redoutable*. The *Constitution*, which was heading for the anchorage, touched on the *Révolution*. The latter ship, badly damaged, set sail, cutting its cable to avoid further damage. The *Fraternité* found itself obliged to force its sails to escape the vessel which was pursuing it. This maneuver was executed with a slowness and ignorance of which Admiral Morard de Galle strongly complained, as we have seen. After the expedition returned to France, a summary was made, by order of the government, of the reports that the captains had sent to the minister. We read in this document: "All the captains agree in saying that their crews, either through bad will or because they were not sufficiently dressed against the cold and the snow, fulfilled their duty extremely badly. . . ."³¹⁵

Some ships even lost their sails because they could not tighten them." We can see the value of the sailors. As for the gunners, the little damage done by the *Droits-de-l'Homme* to the English frigates they were fighting shows what we should think of their skill. The situation, from a material point of view, was perhaps even more dire. The *Pégase*, a few days after its departure, returned to Brest; it was unable to hold the sea any longer. It will be recalled that this vessel, having just completed a campaign in Newfoundland, had been added to the fleet of Admiral Morard de Galle, although it was in urgent need of repairs. The return of the *Pégase* rendered useless the services that Rear-Admiral Richery, an officer of great merit, could have rendered. The *Pluton*, having left with a leak that was rapidly increasing, decided, on December 29, to return to France. The *Surveillante* sank in Bantry Bay and the *Scevola* in the open sea. Some ships did not have spare sails. On all of them, the sails were breaking. Captain Lacrosse wanted to make sail, so that two ships, glimpsed in the fog, would not join the *Indefatigable* and the *Amazone* which were pursuing him. Now, here is what this captain says in his report: "I had a reef in the foretopsail, without a foretopsail, a topsail and foretopsail sailcloth, to starboard, whose halyards and tacks had already broken several times. In vain I had tried five or six times to put a low foresail, but all the maneuvers breaking due to the poor quality of the rope, I was obliged to give up, while the ships which were chasing me carried it without bringing an inch of other sail."³¹⁶

The rigging, poorly laid and lacking solidity, gave way at the slightest effort. It was for this reason, and not as a result of the strength of the wind, that several ships lost topmasts and foretopmasts. The ship *Les Droits-de-l'Homme*, having reduced sail area, lost both of its topmasts, while the frigates pursuing it were running under full sail. Finally, supplies ran short. The expeditionary fleet was barely at sea when this question became a cause of serious concern for the captains. It was an obstacle to those who wanted to remain on the Irish coast until they had news of Admiral Morard de Galle. It was the determining reason for the departure of the officers who, foreseeing only disasters, were in a hurry to bring their ships back to Brest. We see the difference between the navy as it was imagined in Paris and the one we actually had. The minister, Admiral Truguet, was animated by excellent intentions, but he did not have an exact account of the state of our fleets. A few days after his arrival in Brest, Admiral Bouvet received the order to leave his command and remain under arrest. On February 15, 1797, the Directory issued a decree by virtue of which Admiral Bouvet was deprived of his rank. The admiral asked for judges; they were refused (1).

1. Shortly after being discharged, Admiral Bouvet obtained permission to appear before a court martial. He was ordered to go to Brest. A few days later, the government, reversing its decision, ordered Admiral Morard de Galle, commander of the arms in that port, to suspend the convening of the court martial. In the year X, Admiral Bouvet was recalled to active duty.³¹⁷

On July 9, 1797, he was granted discharge. Morard de Galle suffered no disgrace. The minister, as soon as he learned of his arrival in Rochefort, wrote to him that the Directory retained its full confidence in him. He urged him, with the utmost urgency, to return to Brest to resume his command. "I knew," the minister told him, "that the fleet greatly desired the return of its general, and this mark of public esteem can only add to all the reasons that should console you for the obstacles you have encountered and which have paralyzed your zeal and your talents." Rear Admiral Bruix, major general of the squadron, was called to Paris.

The English squadron, which had been blockading the port of Brest when the expeditionary fleet had set sail, was, on that day, as we have said above, thirty-five or forty miles northwest of Ushant. Vice-Admiral Colpoys, under whose command it was placed, learned on the 19th that the French fleet had put to sea. On the 20th, five vessels were reported. This was Rear-Admiral Villeneuve's division, which had left Toulon at the beginning of December. Since the day it had crossed the Strait of Gibraltar, it had not seen the enemy. Rear-Admiral Villeneuve headed south under full sail, pursued by the English. Arriving in sight of the island of Groix, they gave up the chase. The French vessels entered Lorient. The winds, which were in the east, jumped to the northwest, blowing very fresh. Some ships of Admiral Colpoys's squadron suffered damage which forced them to return to England. Shortly after, this admiral, having only six ships left, decided to go to Portsmouth where he anchored on December 31.³¹⁸

The British government, informed on the 20th by the frigate *Indefatigable* that the French had left Brest, had ordered the Canal squadron to put to sea. The need to wait for the ships, which were not ready, and then the bad weather that ensued, delayed our adversaries' movements. On January 8, Lord Bridport set sail with fourteen vessels. After appearing off Ushant, he headed for Cape Clear and Bantry Bay. Sighting no French ships, he returned towards Ushant. On the 19th, having assured himself that the expeditionary fleet had returned to Brest, the English admiral detached five vessels from his squadron which he sent, under the command of Rear-Admiral Parker, to Sir John Jervis. The latter was in the Tagus with ten vessels. Lord Bridport anchored, on February 3, at Spithead, with the rest of his forces.³¹⁹

BOOK IX

The Spanish squadron, under the command of Admiral Don José de Cordova, crosses the Strait of Gibraltar and heads for Cadiz. - Sir John Jervis advances to meet the Spanish. - Battle of February 14. - Don José de Cordova withdraws, abandoning four ships to his adversary. - Insurrection of the English naval crews. - A Dutch squadron, commanded by Admiral de Winter, puts to sea. - Battle of Camperdown. - The Dutch lose nine ships. - Negotiations, initiated with England, with a view to concluding peace, lead to no results. - Admiral Truguet is replaced by Vice-Admiral Pléville-le-Peley. - General disarmament. - Warships placed at the disposal of commerce. - Peace treaty concluded with the Republic of Venice. - Secret clauses concerning the navy. - Occupation of the Ionian Islands. - Rear-Admiral Brueys goes to the Adriatic. Treaty of Campo-Formio. - The Directory returns to the plan to land in England. - The navy takes back the ships temporarily loaned to commerce. - Request for cooperation addressed to Spain and Holland. - Visit made by General Bonaparte to the coasts of the Ocean, the Channel and the North Sea. - Measures taken to give preparations a more energetic impetus. - Admiral Brueys leaves Corfu for Toulon. - His passage in front of the island of Malta.

I

For some time now, the Directory had been asking the Spanish government that Admiral Don Jose de Cordova's squadron, anchored at Cartagena, be ordered to sail to the Ocean. The presence of this admiral at Cadiz would have obliged the English to maintain a squadron off that port. After the failure of the Irish expedition, during which Spain had done nothing to remove part of Great Britain's naval forces from our shores, new steps were taken by the French government to obtain Don Jose de Cordova's passage to Cadiz.³²⁰

At the end of January, the court of Madrid responded favorably to the Directory's request. On February 1, Admiral Don José de Cordova left Cartagena and headed for the strait with twenty-seven ships, seven of which were three-deckers. Sir John Jervis, whose squadron had been anchored off Lisbon since the end of the previous year, was monitoring the movements of the Spanish. When he learned that Don José de Cordova had left Cartagena, he put to sea. One of his ships, the *Saint-George*, with a hundred guns, ran aground on a bank at the entrance to the Tagus. Although this event reduced the number of his ships to ten, he continued his route south. On February 6, five ships, sent by the British Admiralty, joined him. Sir John Jervis established a cruise off Cape St. Vincent. The Spaniards, after crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, were heading for Cadiz, when a very violent easterly gale drove them out to sea. On the morning of the 13th, the frigate *Minerva*, carrying Commodore Nelson's guidon, joined Sir John Jervis. This frigate, which was coming from the island of Elba, had sighted the Spanish fleet outside the strait. In the evening of the same day, the English admiral learned from one of his frigates that the enemy was a few leagues to windward. Don Jose de Cordova was in complete ignorance of his adversary's movements. Knowing that Sir John Jervis had put to sea with ten ships, and not supposing, on the other hand, that the English had received reinforcements, he was convinced that the enemy would not seek to join him. On the 13th, some English ships were sighted. The Spaniards, thinking that these vessels were part of the escort of some merchant fleet, attached no importance to this encounter.³²¹

Some merchant fleet attached no importance to this encounter. The winds having shifted to the west, they made sail to approach land. On the 14th, at sunrise, a light mist covered the horizon. When it dissipated, around ten o'clock in the morning, the English fleet, in an imposing posture, appeared before the astonished eyes of the Spaniards. Lord Jervis's ships, arranged in two very close columns, were advancing to meet Cordova's fleet. The latter had sailed all night without observing any order. It was divided into two groups, one comprising nineteen ships and the other six. The latter, who were very far away and to leeward, hastened to take the closest course to rally the main body of the fleet. Cordova, realizing the dangers of their situation, ran downwind to meet them. Sir John Jervis had too sure an eye not to take advantage of the mistake his adversaries had committed. Forming his squadron in a single line, he headed towards the gap between the two sections of the Spanish fleet. Before the English admiral was able to oppose him, three vessels, belonging to the main group, joined the six leeward vessels. This apparent success made Cordova's situation infinitely more serious. Sixteen vessels, out of the twenty-five that composed his fleet, were near him. On the other hand, he could only rally the others on condition of delivering a decisive fight. Not daring to stop at this party, he took the closest to the wind. Vice-Admiral Alava, under whose orders the division of nine ships was placed, exchanged some cannonballs with the English ships.³²²

Recognizing the impossibility of breaking through, he moved away. Sir John Jervis, who had nothing to fear from this division, since it was downwind, set out in pursuit of the main body of the Spanish fleet. He soon joined his rearguard, on which he concentrated all his efforts. Shortly after the start of the action, Cordova, hoping that the smoke would conceal his movements from the enemy, attempted a second time to rally Vice-Admiral Alava. The *Captain*, of seventy-four, commanded by Nelson, blocked his path. Nelson had seen the maneuver of the *Santissima Trinidad*, a 120-gun ship mounted by Cordova, and he understood its purpose. Immediately leaving the post he occupied in the English line, although he had received no orders from his admiral, he went to meet the Spanish three-decker. After a very sharp engagement, Cordova, abandoning the battlefield to the English seventy-four, rejoined the bulk of his army. The first cannon shots had been fired at eleven thirty. At five o'clock, the Spanish squadron fled towards Cadiz, leaving in the hands of the English two vessels of one hundred and twelve guns, the *Salvador-del-Mundo* and the *San-Jose*, one vessel of eighty, the *San-Nicolas*, and the *San-Isidoro* of seventy-four. The losses of the Spaniards, on the four vessels captured, amounted to two hundred and sixty-one killed and three hundred and forty-two wounded. In the English squadron, there were only seventy-three killed and two hundred and twenty-three wounded, or an average of twenty men on each ship hit by enemy fire.

Such were the various twists and turns of the unfortunate encounter of February 14, 1797. This victory sealed the reputation of Admiral Jervis.³²³

One could not praise too highly the determination he had taken to leave the Tagus and advance, although he had, at that moment, only ten ships, to meet the Spaniards. The skillful maneuvering of the ships he commanded was partly his work. Finally, on the day of the battle, he had given his army a skillful direction. All this was beyond dispute. Nevertheless, the truth obliges it to be said that any naval force, regularly organized, would have defeated this assembly of ships that the Spaniards called a fleet. "In the dispatch, very concise, moreover, which he addressed to the First Lord of the Admiralty to inform him of the Battle of Cape St. Vincent, Sir John Jervis thought it necessary to explain why he had departed from the ordinary rules of tactics. "At ten forty minutes past," he wrote in his report, "the *Bonne-Citoyenne* signaled that the vessels in sight were ships and that the number of these ships was twenty-five. His Majesty's squadron, fifteen ships strong, was formed in two very close lines. By forcing the sails, I was fortunate enough to join the enemy fleet around noon, before it had time to assemble and form a regular line of battle. Such a moment should not be lost." Full of confidence in the skill, valour and discipline of the officers and crews whom I have the honour to command, judging, on the other hand, that the honour of His Majesty's arms and the circumstances of the war in these seas required very great boldness, I felt justified in my own eyes, in not following, on this occasion, the ordinary rules.³²⁴

Passing through the fleet, in a line formed with the greatest speed, I separated, after a partial cannonade, which prevented their reunion until evening, a third of the ships of the main body of the fleet. By the extraordinary efforts of the ships that had the good fortune to join the enemy, four ships were captured and the action ceased around five o'clock in the evening." The victor of Don José de Cordova, Sir John Jervis, became a peer of England, Baron of Meafort and Earl of Saint-Vincent. A pension of three thousand pounds sterling was granted to him. Nelson, whose daring conduct had powerfully contributed to the success of the day, was made a Knight of the Bath. The humiliating defeat, inflicted by fifteen English ships on Cordova's twenty-five ships, was very keenly felt in Spain. To avenge national pride, which Sir John Jervis's victory had cruelly wounded, the government of Charles III disgraced Cordova and his principal officers. This admiral was dismissed and declared unfit for service. A general officer and six captains suffered the same fate.

The Spanish government was obviously entitled to complain about Cordova. He had taken no precautions to inform the progress of his fleet. The Spanish did not suspect the presence of the English squadron, barely a few leagues away, while Sir John Jervis was informed of all their movements. Cordova had only been at the head of the Spanish fleet for a few months. Had he made sufficient efforts, since the day he replaced Don Juan de Langara, to instruct his squadron? It is difficult to say. Perhaps he had also encountered insurmountable difficulties due to the poor composition of the personnel.³²⁵

In any case, those who had allowed such a poorly organized fleet to put to sea were more culpable than Cordova. Admiral Mazzaredo had long ago pointed out the deplorable state of the Spanish navy. A swift disgrace had been the reward for his frankness. This general officer became Cordova's successor. The heads of the Cadiz arsenal were placed under his command. He was given the task of determining the number of vessels that Spain's resources allowed for. Finally, he was given the right to choose the captains and officers of his squadron. These provisions might have deceived public opinion and calmed the resentment of the nation, deeply angered by the defeat of February 14; but their impact ended there. They were powerless to transform the Spanish navy, which had been in decline for too long through the fault of the government.

At the beginning of 1797, it seemed that the English navy had reached the height of its power. However, shortly after Lord Jervis's victory over the Spanish, very serious causes of weakness were revealed in its internal organization. The personnel of the military fleet impatiently endured the regime to which they were subjected. The crews, poorly fed, received insufficient pay. The code of justice, applicable to the navy, contained provisions of a severity bordering on barbarity. The sailors were subjected to continual sequestration; hardly any of them obtained permission to go ashore during the stay their ships were making in the English harbors. Either through ignorance or blindness, the British Admiralty was not concerned about this state of affairs.³²⁶

In the first days of April 1797, a division of the Canal Squadron, commanded by Lord Bridport, was anchored in Portsmouth Harbour. On the 15th, this admiral signaled his ships to sail. The crew of the three-decker *Queen Charlotte*, on which his flag was flying, instead of heading out to maneuver, climbed the shrouds and gave three cheers. All the ships under Lord Bridport's command responded with the same shouts. The officers made futile efforts to suppress the revolt. Those among them who were the target of the crews' hostility were put ashore. A committee, composed of delegates appointed by each ship, took charge of the movement. The leaders of the revolt placed flagpoles at the ends of the lower yards, in order to indicate the fate reserved for those who might be tempted to turn back. The committee made two petitions. The first was addressed to the House of Commons and the second to the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty. The committee demanded, for the crews, an increase in pay, more abundant and better quality provisions. The sick, it said, were treated on warships with extreme negligence. It demanded, on this point, a prompt reform. Men hit by enemy fire should, from now on, be paid by the State until their complete recovery. Finally, the committee requested that, on English harbors, the sailors be allowed to go ashore and see their families. Although these two petitions were written in the most respectful tone, the Admiralty was not ignorant that the crews of Lord Bridport's squadron were firmly resolved not to go to sea until their claims had been attended to.³²⁷

The consternation was all the greater in official circles because the blow, reaching the government, was completely unexpected. The secret of the conspiracy, however surprising it may seem, had been very well kept. At the end of February 1797, anonymous letters, in which only the unfortunate fate of the sailors was mentioned, had been addressed to Lord Bridport. He had handed them over to Lord Howe, Commander-in-Chief of the Canal Fleet. Lord Howe was ill. He instructed Rear-Admiral Spencer to examine the value that should be attributed to these letters. This flag officer declared that there was no serious cause for discontent among the crews. According to him, the spirit of the men was excellent, and there was no need to conceive any alarm. Confident in the investigation made by Rear-Admiral Spencer, Lord Howe believed that these letters came from some disgruntled individuals. He sent them to the British Admiralty, which paid them no attention. At all levels of the hierarchy, the blindness had been complete. The Admiralty moved to Portsmouth. After laborious negotiations, which were broken off and resumed several times, the final agreement was established. The government understood the necessity of making concessions. It was, moreover, pushed in this direction by public opinion, which showed itself favorable to the demands of the crews. Parliament voted the necessary sums to improve the lot of the sailors and marines. Lord Bridport's ships returned to duty. The same was true of the Plymouth squadron, which rose up as soon as it learned of the events at Portsmouth on 15 April 1797.³²⁸

This affair, whose various twists and turns the English nation was following with understandable interest, seemed over when it was learned that the squadrons of Admirals Buckner and Duncan had risen up. The first was off Sherness and the second in Yarmouth harbor. Most of the ships belonging to Admiral Duncan's squadron weighed anchor and joined the vessels anchored in the Thames. After the concessions already made, this new uprising was at a loss in London. It was assumed that the insurgents had an objective unrelated to the naval service. Various clues gave reason to believe that this revolt was linked to the political turmoil that Ireland was, at that time, the scene of. It therefore had, for the English, a particularly alarming character. As had happened at Portsmouth, a committee, composed of delegates appointed by each ship, directed the movements of the squadron. A sailor from the ship Sandwich, named Richard Parker, presided over this committee. This man, who was the real leader of the insurrection, rejected all the proposals made by the Admiralty. The Ministry took energetic measures. A camp was established on the banks of the Thames. Batteries and furnaces were built to red-hot the cannonballs. The government wanted to be able to blast the rebellious ships, if circumstances required it. The crews of the Portsmouth squadron displayed patriotic feelings. They implored their comrades to return to duty. A split soon occurred among the insurgents. Several vessels, cutting their cables, placed themselves under the protection of the forts. Richard Parker, betrayed by his accomplices, was handed over to some soldiers sent on board the Sandwich to secure his person.³²⁹

Richard Parker appeared before a court martial. His attitude was that of a man who knew his life was at stake in the game he had played. During the proceedings, he showed himself firm and resolute. Sentenced to be hanged, Parker died courageously. Thus ended the crisis that had neutralized, for several months, the greater part of Great Britain's naval forces.

Since the beginning of the war, England had encountered the greatest difficulties in assembling the personnel necessary for the ever-increasing needs of its navy. It resorted to the press. While this measure provided it with some sailors, it also had the consequence of introducing bad characters and vagrants on board its ships. It also happened that individuals without resources, attracted by the lure of a bonus, accepted an engagement in the navy. Among them were outcasts who soon felt the full weight of their new condition. It was mainly from among people of this kind that the insurrection was recruited. France, Spain and Holland made no effort to take advantage of the critical situation in which the English navy found itself at this time.³³⁰

II

In the first days of October 1797, the Dutch Admiral de Winter put to sea with a squadron comprising, in addition to a few frigates, corvettes, and brigs, five seventy-four-caliber vessels, five sixty-four-caliber vessels, and four fifty-caliber vessels. Admiral Duncan, charged with monitoring the movements of the Dutch navy, was at Yarmouth. Immediately summoning all the forces under his command, he advanced to meet his adversary. The encounter took place on October 11, not far from Camperdown, on the coast of Holland. The English squadron consisted of sixteen vessels: seven seventy-four-gun vessels, seven sixty-four-gun vessels, and two fifty-gun vessels. Admiral Duncan had the advantage of the wind. Crossing the enemy line, he placed his ships alongside and to leeward of the Dutch ships. Engaged in such conditions, the fight was to be decisive. Officers and sailors on Admiral de Winter's squadron fought vigorously, but fortune betrayed their courage. Nine ships, two of seventy-four, five of sixty-four and two of fifty, fell into the hands of the English. Admiral de Winter was taken prisoner. Rear-Admiral Story managed to bring the remnants of the Dutch fleet back to the Texel. On the day of October 11, the English had superiority in numbers. They were more skillful than their adversaries and they had more sophisticated equipment.³³¹

Admiral Duncan's maneuver, by not allowing the disabled ships to flee, had turned the Dutch defeat into disaster. Admiral de Winter's squadron was composed of small vessels, most of them very old and in poor condition. The personnel manning them were inexperienced, but they had been chosen from among seafaring men. It had not been believed in Holland, as had happened in France at the beginning of the Revolution, that men who had been laborers the day before would be promptly able to replace the sailors of the classes. Nor had the Batavian Republic imitated the conduct of Spain, which had supplemented the crews of Cordova's fleet with people taken from prisons or picked up in the streets of large cities. The English had also paid dearly for their victory. Admiral Duncan's ships had 228 killed and 812 wounded. The Dutch had 1200 men out of action. The English ships were in a very bad state. As for the ships captured by Admiral Duncan, they were so badly damaged that it was deemed pointless to repair them. Since the beginning of the war, there had not been such fierce fighting. The losses suffered by Admiral Duncan's squadron made a very strong impression in England, where people were beginning to get used to easy victories. A public subscription was made for the wounded and the families of the dead. After paying tribute to the heroic defense of Admiral de Winter's ships, we must ask ourselves what the Dutch government was trying to achieve by sending this squadron to sea. A few months earlier, it would have been understood that he wanted to take advantage of the disorganization of the naval forces of Great Britain.³³²

But by October, the mutineers had returned to order. To go out at that time, with no other goal than to meet the enemy, was to run headlong into defeat.

The English government, yielding to public pressure, began negotiations with the French Republic with a view to concluding peace. Conferences took place in Lille between the plenipotentiaries of the two nations. They yielded no results. The representative of the Cabinet of Saint James, Lord Malmesbury, left France during July 1797. It was at this time that Truguet, pursued by the enmity of the Councils, was forced to resign his functions. He was replaced on July 16, 1797, by Vice-Admiral Pléville-le-Peley, one of France's plenipotentiaries at the Lille conferences. Under Admiral Truguet's administration, great efforts had been made to increase our armaments, but personnel had been neglected. For a long time now, sailors and workers had not received any pay. They and their families were reduced to the deepest poverty. Vice-Admiral Pléville-le-Peley, very concerned about this state of affairs, wanted to remedy it. He imagined that he would manage to pay the current pay and little by little the arrears. On August 3, that is to say, a few days after taking up his duties, he sent a letter to the heads of the naval service in the various ports of the Republic, explaining his intentions. Unable, despite his insistence with the Directory, to obtain the necessary sums to meet his commitments, he decided to disarm a certain number of vessels.³³³

Admiral Pléville-le-Peley went further. On September 26, 1797, he obtained authorization from the Directory to transfer frigates, corvettes, brigs, and other light vessels to merchant shipping, to be equipped for privateering. A few rare ships, almost without crews, represented all that remained of the French navy in the ocean ports. However, the Directory, yielding to General Bonaparte's insistence, maintained some armaments in the Mediterranean. We had a naval division in the Adriatic and, at Toulon, five vessels commanded by Rear Admiral Brueys.

In April 1797, the city of Verona, a dependency of Venice, had a French garrison. Its throats were cut in a riot fomented by the government. At about the same time, a small French vessel, the lugger *Libérateur-de-l'Italie*, commanded by Lieutenant Laugier, pursued by two Austrian vessels, appeared off Venice. It was not allowed to enter the Lido. Captain Laugier asked permission to anchor under the batteries, and while waiting for a reply, he dropped anchor. The port commander ordered him to sail. Before the lugger could set sail, one of the forts fired a broadside. Captain Laugier, believing it to be a mistake, had his crew lowered onto the false deck. Remaining on the bridge with a few men, he called out to the commander of the fort over the loudspeaker to inform him that he was withdrawing. New cannon shots and a very heavy musket fire were directed at his ship. Captain Laugier and the men surrounding him were killed.³³⁴

Boats boarded the lugger. The men manning them massacred most of the crew. The survivors were taken ashore and imprisoned. General Bonaparte, upon learning of the events we have just recounted, marched his troops into the States of the Republic, threatening to exact resounding revenge for the attacks committed against our soldiers and sailors. The Venetians made no attempt to resist us. The Grand Council renounced its sovereign rights. The Senate was dissolved, and a provisional government, appointed under our auspices, took charge of affairs. On May 16, 1797, a peace treaty was concluded between France and the Republic of Venice. A French division was to occupy Venetian territory to maintain order, the safety of persons and property, and to assist the first steps of the new government. Attached to the stipulations contained in the treaty that was made public were several secret articles. Two of them concerned the navy. The Republic of Venice undertook to supply us with hemp, ropes, tackle, and other items necessary for the service of the fleet, worth three million francs. It was further agreed that it would deliver to us three ships of the line and two frigates in good condition, armed and equipped with everything necessary, but not including the crew. Immediately after the entry of our troops into Venice, the warships and the arsenal were handed over to us. Division Chief Perrée was in Ancona with several ships. We had five frigates, three corvettes and two brigs in Venice, under the command of Captain Bourdé, of the *Sensible*, and a flotilla on Lake Garda, commanded by Frigate Captain Allemand.³³⁵

These ships, mostly poorly armed, offered no available resources in terms of personnel. General Bonaparte wrote to Paris to request the dispatch of a sufficient number of officers of all ranks to whom he intended to entrust the main posts in the Venetian fleet. He requested officers, engineers, naval artillery chiefs, masters, and foremen for the harbor service. Finally, he insisted that Admiral Brueys's squadron sail to the Adriatic, from where it could evacuate the supplies contained in the arsenal to Toulon. The Directory sent engineers and a few officers, and announced the squadron's imminent departure. General Bonaparte, wishing to seize the Venetian possessions in the Levant, assembled, under the command of Frigate Captain Bourdé, the thirty-six-gun frigates *Sensible* and *Arthémise*, two sixty-four-gun Venetian vessels, *Gloire* and *Éole*, and several transports and avisos. This division set sail, carrying a force of two thousand men, fifteen hundred French and five hundred Venetians, under the command of General Gentili. Our troops occupied Corfu, Zakynthos, and Cephalonia without resistance. A small squadron of the Republic, comprising four vessels, frigates, corvettes, and avisos, was in these waters. It ranged itself under our flag.

Admiral Brueys was in the harbor of Toulon when he received the order to go to Venice. He set sail for this destination on June 27, with the ships *Guillaume Tell* and *Tonnant*, each eighty, *Aquilon*, *Mercure*, *Généreux* and *Heureux*, each seventy-four, and the frigates *Junon* and *Justice*, each forty-four.³³⁶

He was instructed to bring back to Toulon the Venetian squadron and a convoy loaded with all the wood, hemp, rope, and other supplies that could be delivered to him. General Bonaparte had written on June 23 to Admiral Brueys, indicating Corfu as the point where he was to go. He asked him to keep him informed of his movements and to warn him if the English were concerned about what we were doing in the Adriatic, so that he could send reinforcements to the troops stationed in the Ionian Islands. Admiral Brueys had left when this letter arrived in Toulon. But, at sea, he encountered the corvette *La Brune*, and he learned from its commander, Division Chief Lejoille, that there was only one ship left afloat in Venice. It was a vessel whose armament was not finished. The ships in a state of sea had been sent to Corfu. Admiral Brueys headed for this point where he arrived on July 13. The French squadron found, in the harbor, six vessels of sixty-four, two frigates and two corvettes which it took possession of. During the month of August, Admiral Brueys went to Venice where he was able to stock up on three months' supplies and spare parts. General Bonaparte had the crews paid and clothed. At the end of September, Admiral Brueys left again for Corfu, passing through Ragusa. He was to set sail for Toulon as soon as the Venetian squadron, which was still being fitted out, was in a position to follow him. General Gentili, who commanded the Ionian Islands, was ordered to feed the squadron on a daily basis and to provide field provisions to the Venetian ships.³³⁷

Finally, this general was instructed to remit a sum of fifty thousand francs to the admiral so that he could raise sailors from Zakynthos, Cephalonia, and Corfu. General Bonaparte, at the same time as giving these instructions, wrote to Paris to obtain permission for Admiral Brueys to remain in the Adriatic. He asked the Directory to send him naval officers, about thirty, and sixty or eighty non-commissioned officers to be distributed among the Venetian squadron. Already, on the ships that comprised it, the soldiers forming the garrisons and a certain number of sailors were French.

Finally, the general asked the Directory to issue a decree authorizing him to cultivate the contacts he had in Malta and to seize the island whenever he deemed it appropriate. On October 17, General Bonaparte signed the famous Treaty of Campo Formio with Austria, which assured us possession of Belgium and Mainz. This treaty also stipulated that the Ionian Islands would remain French. All the nations united against us had laid down their arms, with the exception of Great Britain. It was against this power that we were going to direct our efforts. Concern was already being expressed about the English expedition. On November 14, General Bonaparte ordered Admiral Brueys to be ready to set sail, taking the Venetian ships with him. After escorting the latter to the Saint-Pierre Islands, on the coast of Sardinia, he was to direct them to Toulon and, with his squadron, take, according to the general's words, "his flight for the great expedition." General Bonaparte announced his appointment to the command of the army of England and informed Rear-Admiral Brueys that Truguet was placed at the head of the expeditionary fleet.³³⁸

"You can see," he told him, "how necessary it would be to have you there with your six ships, your frigates, and your corvettes. A diplomatic agent had just been sent to Malta. Furthermore, the sixth half-brigade, sixteen hundred strong, had left for Corfu. After giving this information to Admiral Brueys, the general added: "You can embark three thousand men for the small expedition, and I will send you orders for both through one of my aides-de-camp." The large expedition was the landing in England, and the small one, the conquest of Malta. On November 14, General Bonaparte, designated as French plenipotentiary to the congress assembling at Rastadt, left Italy. Before his departure, he gave the most precise instructions for the ships under construction in Venice to be completed, fitted out, and shipped to one of our ports. On the 30th, the ratifications of the Peace Treaty of Campo Formio were exchanged at Rastadt. Shortly afterward, General Bonaparte left for Paris, where, upon his arrival, he set about preparing for the expedition to England. To this end, he worked with the Ministers of War and the Navy, or rather, he dictated to them the resolutions to be taken. General Desaix replaced him, temporarily, in command of the army being assembled for this campaign.

Vice-Admiral Pléville-le-Peley recalled to service the sailors who had been dismissed a few months earlier with so little thought. The government took back, paying large compensation, the frigates, corvettes and other vessels that it had ceded to commerce. It was necessary to retrain the crews.³³⁹

It was then that the extent of the error committed by dismissing them was understood. The sailors of the naval registration went into hiding and only a small number were found. The government had no money and the expedition to England required a lot of it. The Councils, on the proposal of the Directory, voted for a loan to meet this expense. A letter was written from Paris to the court of Madrid to request that it assemble at Cadiz as many ships, frigates, and light vessels as it could. This squadron, provided with three months' supplies and carrying a landing force of fifteen thousand men, was to be ready to put to sea at the end of April. If it were not blocked by superior forces, it would set sail at that time to a destination that would be agreed upon by the two governments. The Directory also requested that the vessels stationed at Ferrol, ships, frigates and corvettes, be sent to Brest with provisions and spare parts for three months and full crews. The Batavian Republic had undertaken to take part in the English expedition. It provided its Texel fleet, troops and the transport ships necessary for their embarkation. General Andreossy and the engineer Forfait were instructed to request from the Dutch government two hundred flat-bottomed vessels with good sailing ships and two hundred fishing boats or others, each capable of carrying eighty to one hundred men. They were also to obtain that the gunboats, gunboats and gunboats be armed and sent to Dunkirk. In Paris, Boulogne was expected to accommodate fifty gunboats, four to five hundred fishing boats, one hundred stable boats and twenty-five hundred-ton vessels.³⁴⁰

Calais was to contain four hundred vessels, and each of the small ports of Etaples and Ambleteuse fifty fishing boats. General Caffarelli was ordered to put the coastal batteries in good condition and to increase their number, if this was deemed necessary to ensure the security of the ports intended to receive the expedition's vessels. Engineer officers, embarked on privateers, inspected the coasts of England from Folkestone to Rye.

At the beginning of February 1798, General Bonaparte visited the coasts of the Ocean, the Channel, and the North Sea. He returned to Paris convinced that the landing could not be carried out during the year. Preparations for the navy were making no progress. There were neither workmen nor sailors in our ports. For several months now, they had barely managed to arm a few vessels. From Le Havre to Antwerp, there were enough vessels to carry fifty thousand infantry and four thousand cavalry; but no measures had been taken to charter them and make the necessary arrangements on board. No attention was paid to the stable boats. The construction of gunboats was proceeding extremely slowly. The government, at the request of General Bonaparte, took steps to give all the work a more energetic impetus. The coastline extending from Cherbourg to Antwerp formed a maritime district, of which the engineer Forfait became the organizer. Rear Admiral Lacrosse, appointed inspector of this part of the coast, took charge of naval matters.³⁴¹

Brigadier General Andreossy was responsible for everything related to military armaments. These three officers formed a commission that received orders directly from the commander-in-chief. It was decided that money would be sent to it and that it would itself cover the expenses it ordered.

Admiral Brueys had not left Corfu. Vice-Admiral Pléville-le-Peley wrote to him on December 14, 1797, to go to Brest, as the squadron he commanded had been designated to be part of the expedition to England. The minister was very little aware of the situation of our naval forces in the Adriatic. General Gentili had not found sufficient resources in the possessions under his command to comply with General Bonaparte's instructions. He had left Admiral Brueys without food or money. At the end of December, the squadron had only a very small quantity of provisions left. Moreover, the crews had been without pay for five months. Finally, two vessels were in urgent need of repairs. The situation of the vessels at Ancona, under the command of Division Chief Lejoille, was no better than that of the ships anchored at Corfu. The Minister, informed of this state of affairs, decided, after referring the matter to the Directory, that all the naval forces detached to Ancona and in the northern Adriatic Gulf would be recalled to Toulon to be repaired and supplied. If the personnel was insufficient, the Venetian ships and even our frigates were to be armed with flutes. On February 12, 1798, the minister informed Admiral Brueys of these provisions, ordering him to take the necessary measures to ensure its execution.³⁴²

The squadron left Corfu on February 24, taking with it eight Venetian vessels, five ships, *Banel*, *Dubois*, *Frontin*, *Robert*, and *Causse*, and three frigates, *Mantoue*, *Leoben*, and *Montenotte*. Construction work on the ships *Laharpe*, *Steingel*, and *Beyraud*, and the frigates *Muiron* and *Carrère*, which we had found in the shipyards upon our arrival in Venice, had been actively advanced. These five vessels had been in Ancona since the end of December 1797, where their fitting out was being completed.

During his stay in the Adriatic, Admiral Brueys had gone to Passariano, the headquarters of the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Italy. The latter had discussed his plan for Malta with him. The Admiral, who knew the island well, had been able to give the General useful information in the event that this expedition was decided upon. In a letter of 14 November, written before leaving for Rastadt, General Bonaparte, as we have seen above, had informed the Admiral that he would send him, by an aide-de-camp, instructions relating to the departure of his squadron for Brest and the expedition to Malta. Time had passed and no new instructions had reached the squadron commander. He had therefore been unable to ask General Gentili, who was in command at Corfu, for landing troops. Admiral Brueys had a momentary thought of attempting a raid on the island of Malta with the troops forming the garrisons of his ships, to which he would have added detachments of sailors.³⁴³

Two Maltese, whom he was taking with him, initially approved of this plan, but, after reflection, they felt that its execution presented too great difficulties. One could not, they said, succeed in this enterprise with so few troops unless one found energetic support among the population. Certain of their compatriots' feelings of sympathy for France, they were not as certain of their eagerness to take up arms. Forced to abandon this plan, Admiral Brueys conceived another. Needless to say, having received no orders from the government relating to the operation he was planning, the squadron commander was bound to extreme circumspection. Success alone could absolve him of the consequences of such an act. On March 3, Admiral Brueys appeared off Malta. The ship *Frontin* had taken on a considerable leak. The admiral brought it into the port to repair its damage. The two Maltese were on this ship. They were to contact the partisans of France and promise them our cooperation, if they had the firm will to fight on our side. The squadron cruised within sight of Malta, communicating every day with the *Frontin*, on board which it took on food and refreshments for the sick. The *Frontin* had been quarantined and very strict surveillance prevented any communication between the ship and the inhabitants of the island. No agreement was established with those who could have assisted the admiral. On the 10th, the squadron, rallied by the *Frontin*, continued its route to Toulon.³⁴⁴

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BOOK X

Weakness of the French Navy. - England's development of its armaments. - General Bonaparte submits the plan for the Egyptian expedition to the Directory. - Rear-Admiral Bruix replaces Vice-Admiral Pléville-le-Peley at the Ministry of the Navy. - A squadron, under the command of Vice-Admiral Brueys, is formed at Toulon. - The expeditionary fleet sets sail. - It is joined by convoys from Genoa and Ajaccio. - Capture of the islands of Malta and Goze. - Admiral Nelson appears off Malta, a few days after the conquest of this island by our troops. - The English squadron heads for Egypt. - It returns to Sicily. - The French expedition anchors on July 1st in the harbor of Marabout. - The army captures Alexandria. - The squadron goes to Aboukir. - Soundings made in the passes leading to the Old Port. - Instructions from General Bonaparte to Vice-Admiral Brueys. - Indecision of the commander-in-chief of our squadron. - Deprivation of our ships from the point of view of food and equipment. Nelson, informed of the true destination of the French expedition, heads again for Alexandria. - On August 1st, the English squadron presents itself at the entrance to the bay of Aboukir. - Anchorage of the French fleet. - Dispositions taken by Vice-Admiral Brueys. - Mode of attack adopted by Admiral Nelson. - Battle of Aboukir. - Explosion of the *Orient*. - Nine ships fall into the enemy's hands. - The captain of the *Timoléon* throws his ship ashore and sets it ablaze. - Admiral Villeneuve reaches the open sea with the seventy-four-strong ships, *Guillaume-Tell* and *Généreux*, and the frigates *Diane* and the *Justice*. - Losses suffered by both armies. - Observations relating to the Battle of Aboukir. - Skill displayed by Admiral Nelson. - Poor dispositions taken by Vice-Admiral Brueys. - Responsibility falling to this admiral. - Role played by Rear-Admiral Villeneuve. - Fine conduct of several ships, particularly the *Franklin* and the *Tonnant*. Capture of the *Leander* by the *Généreux*.

I

After the disasters it had suffered, the French navy was, at the beginning of 1798, reduced to the most extreme weakness.³⁴⁵

On the other hand, it could not count on the support of the Allied navies. The Spanish were blockaded in Cadiz by Lord Jervis. The Dutch, defeated at the Battle of Camperdown, were incapable of any effort. The English navy, on the contrary, was in a formidable situation. Twenty-one vessels, under the command of Admiral Duncan, were cruising in the North Sea. The Canal Fleet consisted of thirty-one vessels. The squadron, placed under the command of Lord Jervis, was twenty-eight vessels strong. Twenty vessels were stationed in the Caribbean Sea and on the coast of Newfoundland. The English had fifteen vessels in India. Finally, thirteen vessels, anchored in the ports of England, were ready to sail. To these one hundred and twenty-eight vessels, carrying from fifty to one hundred and twelve guns, were added a proportional number of frigates, corvettes and light vessels. The English could very quickly concentrate considerable forces at any point in the seas of Europe. Under these conditions, the project of landing in England, pursued by the Directory, presented no favorable chance. General Bonaparte proposed to substitute another plan of campaign. The general wanted France to take possession of the island of Malta and Egypt. On March 5, 1798, the general submitted to the Directory a note in which he said that the conquest of these two points could be made with twenty-five thousand infantry, three thousand cavalry, sixty field guns and forty siege pieces. To carry the army and the equipment, the government would charter merchant ships in Nice, Antibes and Marseille.³⁴⁶

A squadron, assembled in Toulon, and on which troops would also be embarked, would be responsible for protecting the convoy. These various preparations would require an expenditure of eight to ten million.

Whether the Directory recognized that it had entertained very serious illusions about the possibility of landing an army on British soil, or whether it was subject to the influence of General Bonaparte, the Egyptian expedition was resolved. It was agreed to keep this decision secret. The decrees concerning the new enterprise were not to be printed. In order to deceive the enemy, the armaments begun in the North continued. The commissions sitting in Paris and in the ports, all of which were concerned with the planned landing in England, remained in operation. Events were preparing the Ministry of the Navy for a role that was all the more difficult because the resources available to this department were very limited. Vice-Admiral Pléville-le-Peley, worn out by age and illness, was not up to his task. The government appointed Rear-Admiral Bruix as his successor. General Bonaparte was placed at the head of the Army of the Orient. This included the naval forces of the Mediterranean, the land and sea forces stationed in the eighth and twenty-third military divisions and in the departments of Corcyra, Ithaca and the Aegean Sea, and finally the divisions of the Army of Italy which occupied Genoa and Civita-Vecchia. The Directory appointed a commission responsible for the inspection of the Mediterranean coasts. This was its official title, but in reality, this commission was to correspond directly with General Bonaparte, receive his orders, and ensure their execution.³⁴⁷

Preparations moved quickly. Civita-Vecchia, Genoa, Bastia, and Toulon were designated as the departure points for the expedition. The ships necessary for the embarkation of troops and equipment were assembled in these various ports. All the vessels in the Toulon arsenal were armed. Rear-Admiral Brueys, promoted to the rank of Vice-Admiral, took command of the naval forces destined for the Egyptian expedition. Rear-Admirals Villeneuve, Decrès, and Blanquet-Duchayla were called upon to serve under his orders. According to government instructions, the squadron was to be ready to sail in the last days of April.

General Bonaparte was preparing to leave Paris for Toulon when an unexpected event delayed his departure. Our ambassador in Vienna had been insulted during a riot. Upon learning this news, the Directory regarded a break with Austria as imminent. On April 23, orders were sent to Generals Baraguey d'Hilliers and Desaix, the former in Genoa and the latter in Civita-Vecchia, to disembark their troops. Both were placed at the disposal of General Brune, commander-in-chief of the Army of Italy. The events in the Austrian capital were of no importance. As soon as it was certain in Paris that peace would not be disturbed, preparations for the expedition, which had been temporarily interrupted, resumed their course. General Bonaparte arrived in Toulon on May 9. Our fleet, held at anchor by contrary winds, did not set sail until the 19th. It was composed of the following vessels:³⁴⁸

The *Orient* of one hundred and twenty; the *Guillaume Tell*, the *Franklin*, the *Tonnant* of eighty; the *Spartiate*, the *Aquilon*, the *Généreux*, the *Timoléon*, the *Heureux*, the *Guerrier*, the *Peuple-Souverain*, the *Mercure* and the *Conquérant* of seventy-four; the *Diane*, the *Justice*, the *Juno*, of forty; the *Alceste*, the *Sérieuse* and the *Badine*, of thirty-six. Two ships, the *Causse* and the *Dubois*, and seven frigates, the *Sensible*, the *Courageuse*, the *Carrère*, the *Muiron*, the *Leoben*, the *Mantoue*, the *Montenotte*, were armed en flutes. The squadron included, in addition to the vessels mentioned above, bombards and gunboats. As for the convoy, it was composed of one hundred and twenty-one ships, some armed in Toulon, others coming from Marseille. Twenty thousand men and one thousand horses were embarked on this fleet.

According to the decrees issued by the Convention, the principal person in the military ports was a civil servant. Admiral Truguet had requested, during his ministry, that this regime, contrary to the interests of the navy, be modified. On this point, he had engaged in a very lively struggle with the Councils in which he had been defeated. At that time, communications between Toulon and Paris were extremely slow. During the arming of the squadron commanded by Admiral Brueys, the port administrator, Mr. Najac, had, on many occasions, taken important decisions alone. It was not that he wanted to assume unlawful authority, but he feared that while waiting for orders he would delay the expedition's departure. It would have been necessary for the commander, to whom circumstances gave such great authority, to possess extensive maritime knowledge. Mr. Najac enjoyed a good reputation as an administrator. Whatever his merits, in this respect he did not and could not have the special qualities required by his position.³⁴⁹

To equip a large number of ships had been his main and probably his only objective. To achieve this result, he had deployed a great deal of zeal and activity. As for the value of the ships, he had not been concerned. The *Guerrier*, the *Peuple-Souverain*, and the *Conquérant* were out of service vessels. The first two had been condemned for a year. The *Conquérant* was in such a state that no one had dared to embark the regulation artillery on this ship. Never, in peacetime, would anyone have thought of sending these ships to sea. There was not a single ship in the squadron with a complete crew. The *Orient*, the flagship, had 850 men instead of 1130. The standard complement of the eighty-man ships was 866. Now, the *Guillaume-Tell* had 800 men, the *Franklin* 650 and the *Tonnant* 730. The seventy-four-man ships had 766 men. The *Timoléon* had 500, the *Spartiate* 550, the *Aquilon*, the *Heureux*, the *Mercure* and the *Généreux* 600, the *Guerrier* 620 and the *Peuple-Souverain* 670. The *Conquérant* had barely a few hundred men. The frigates were in no better condition. Each of them was missing about a third of the standard complement. Finally, in these crews thus reduced, the sailors of the classes and the gunners, that is to say the men without whom one can neither sail nor fight, were in very small numbers. After the question of personnel came that of supplies. This second question had not been treated with more attention than the first.³⁵⁰

These vessels, which did not know where or when they would be able to find resources, in terms of equipment, left with almost no spare parts. Finally, it had been decided in Paris that the expedition's ships would take three months' worth of provisions. Most of them did not have them. Such was the situation of this squadron, whose armament had been presided over by no serious maritime idea.

At the time Admiral Brueys left Toulon, there was no certain news from the English. We assumed that they had no warships in the Mediterranean. However, it was doubtful that our fleet, whose progress was expected to be very slow, would reach its destination without encountering the enemy. It was necessary to prepare for this eventuality. In a battle with the English, the army could lend the navy the most useful assistance. General Bonaparte indicated in advance the role that the passenger troops would fulfill, if this hypothesis were realized. Generals, officers and soldiers had combat posts. The arrangements made on board the *Orient* were as follows. General Lannes, who was at the head of the grenadiers, was to place forty on the quarterdeck, sixty on the gangways, eighteen in each top and the same number to guard the main chamber. General Caffarelli was in charge of the artillery service, on the forecastle, with ten land gunners, ten sea gunners, twenty novices or cabin boys, eighty soldiers or grenadiers. The artillery battalion commander Foulér commanded the battery of twelve. He had with him fifteen land gunners, fifteen sea gunners, sixty apprentices or cabin boys and one hundred infantrymen.³⁵¹

The twenty-four battery, manned by thirteen land gunners, nineteen sea gunners, two hundred men of the sixth and sixty apprentices or cabin boys, was placed under the command of General Dammartin. The most senior lieutenant and artillery captain Ruty, having under their orders thirteen land gunners, nineteen sea gunners, forty apprentices and two hundred and fifty guides or soldiers, commanded the thirty-six battery. The troops not employed were kept in the lower battery. Twice a day, generals, officers, sailors and soldiers went to their posts and drilled, some with cannon and others with musketry.

The French fleet, driven by a strong northwest breeze, quickly moved away from the coast of Provence. A few days after its departure, it joined the convoys from Genoa and Ajaccio. Admiral Brueys continued, under small sails, along the eastern coast of Corsica in order to give the convoy from Civita-Vecchia time to join it. As the convoy was slow to appear, General Bonaparte continued on his route. On June 9, Malta was sighted. The conquest of this island had been decided in Paris. Troops were put ashore at several points. On June 12, after a few unimportant engagements, we were masters of the islands of Malta and Goze. The fleet, joined a few days earlier by the convoy from Civita-Vecchia, numbered more than four hundred sails. On the 19th, it resumed its route towards Egypt.³⁵²

II

When the first news of the preparations we were making at Toulon reached England, the government saw these armaments as nothing more than a ploy to lure Lord Jervis into the Mediterranean. If the latter left, Admiral Mazzaredo would put to sea. Consequently, in London, there was no desire to deviate from the course of action currently being pursued. The British navy tightly blockaded the Spanish in Cadiz and the Dutch in Texel. Considerable forces were guarding Brest and the Channel coast. The danger of an invasion, the one the English nation viewed with the greatest fear, thus seemed completely averted. However, the reports of the English agents in Italy presented the preparations of the French in such a formidable aspect that the British government thought it necessary to have information on what was happening at Toulon. Lord Jervis, in accordance with the instructions of the Admiralty, detached three ships and four frigates to the Mediterranean. This division, commanded by Admiral Nelson, was, on May 19, 1798, about twenty-five leagues south of the Hyères Islands, when it was assailed by a violent northwest gale. The seventy-four-strong *Vanguard*, which the admiral was sailing, lost all its masts. The enemy ships, fleeing with the wind behind them, made for the coast of Sardinia.³⁵³

Arriving near land, the *Vanguard* was on the verge of being lost. Finally, on May 22, Admiral Nelson reached the anchorage off Saint-Pierre Island. By the 27th, the *Vanguard* had set up a makeshift mast and repaired its major damage. Admiral Nelson put to sea again. Arriving off Toulon on May 31, he was informed of the departure of the French squadron, but he was unable to obtain any information on the route it had taken. On June 5, the brig *La Mutine*, carrying urgent dispatches, joined it.

The English government, which, until then, had not paid much attention to our preparations, was beginning to become alarmed. In London, people were wondering whether these concentrations of troops and ships, made at different points in the Mediterranean, did not have England as their objective. The Admiralty, making a considerable effort, armed new ships. It sent them to Lord Jervis, who at the same time received the order to increase the squadron detached in the Mediterranean to fourteen vessels. Great Britain was able to achieve this result without touching the arrangements which enabled it to hold in check, on all seas, the naval forces of France, Holland, and Spain. Lord Jervis, in the instructions he addressed to Nelson by *La Mutine*, seemed to believe that we wanted to attack Naples or Sicily. Perhaps, he added, we were proposing to land, to some point on the coast of Spain, an army with which we would march against Portugal. Finally, examining a last hypothesis, which particularly interested England, the Count of Saint-Vincent wondered if our real project was not to cross the Strait of Gibraltar and throw troops into Ireland.³⁵⁴

Admiral Nelson was to search for the French squadron. He was instructed to pursue it to any point in the Mediterranean, the Adriatic, the Morea, the Archipelago, or even the Black Sea. He was free to take whatever route he deemed appropriate; Admiral Jervis gave him no instructions in this regard. To capture our ships, sink them, or burn them—in a word, to destroy the French squadron and the convoy under its escort—such was the goal. It was up to him to employ the most appropriate means to achieve it. On June 7, Admiral Nelson linked up with the eleven ships, ten of seventy-four and one of fifty, sent to him by Admiral Jervis. Several neutral vessels were questioned, but none of them knew the destination of the French squadron. Nevertheless, knowing that it had left Toulon with northwest winds, Admiral Nelson headed east.

In the first days of June, the Spanish ambassador to the French Republic received news from Madrid that an English squadron had entered the Mediterranean. He was to bring this information to the attention of the Directory, in accordance with the instructions of M. de Savedra, Minister of Foreign Affairs to King Charles IV. He was also instructed to report that there had been no favorable change in the relative situation of the squadrons commanded by Admirals Mazzaredo and Jervis. The latter was blockading Cadiz with eighteen ships. The Spanish had only twenty ready to go to sea. Under these conditions, the Madrid cabinet considered that Admiral Mazzaredo should not run the risk of an engagement.³⁵⁵

The ambassador was instructed to assure the French government that the Spanish squadron would sortie and give battle if the English weakened themselves through the formation of a new detachment. At about the same time, information was received in Toulon that several enemy vessels had entered the Saint-Pierre Islands on May 22nd, while resting. Furthermore, a brig coming from Ajaccio had sighted Nelson's squadron heading east off the coast of Provence. Pursued by the brig *La Mutine*, this vessel had managed to escape. The commandant hastened to transmit this information to Paris. These various circumstances placed Mr. Najac in a difficult position. He had received from General Bonaparte the order to send to Egypt a certain number of vessels whose armament was not complete, at the time of Admiral Brueys' departure. This convoy, composed of twenty-six ships loaded with artillery, war munitions and supplies of all kinds, was ready. A small corvette was the only escort that the port could give it. Should this convoy be sent to sea? M. Najac explained this situation to the Minister of the Navy and he asked him to give him orders. Rear-Admiral Bruix replied that he could not, at the distance at which he was placed, direct the operations of the port of Toulon. The commander had to comply with the instructions given to him by General Bonaparte. As for the departure of convoys or isolated vessels, it was appropriate that it should take place whenever, following information from outside, the port authorities believed the moment to be favorable. It was of the greatest importance that General Bonaparte be promptly warned of the presence of the English in the Mediterranean.³⁵⁶

Two avisos, carrying dispatches from the Minister of the Navy and the commandant of Toulon, were sent, by different routes, to search for the squadron.

Hampered by calms and light breezes, the English did not round Cape Corsica until June 12. Ships sent by Nelson to the Italian coast brought him no information. On June 17, the English squadron arrived off Naples. They learned that the French had appeared near the coast of Sardinia, heading south. Sir William Hamilton, the British ambassador to the Neapolitan government, assumed that the conquest of Malta was our objective. On June 20, the English entered the Strait of Messina. There, a nasty surprise was in store for them. They learned that we were masters of the islands of Malta and Goze. It was supposed that our fleet was still at anchor near the islands. The enemy continued its route, covering itself with sails. If circumstances had not allowed Nelson to oppose our designs, he still had the hope of surprising our fleet in disorder. A victory would have softened the regrets that the English people could not fail to feel on learning that such an important maritime position had fallen into our hands. On June 22, about twelve leagues southeast of Cape Passaro, the English communicated with a vessel that had passed in the middle of our fleet. This was, at that moment, to the east of Malta, running astern with northwest winds. Nelson, convinced that Egypt was the goal of our expedition, headed for Alexandria. He arrived on the 28th in sight of this city.

The most profound calm reigned in the port.³⁵⁷

A ship of the line and four frigates, flying the Turkish flag, and a few rare merchant ships were sighted. Nothing the English saw indicated the events of a recent struggle. Some officers went ashore. They were taken, under heavy guard, to the governor. The latter was greatly alarmed by the sudden appearance of such a large fleet. Upon learning the reason that brought Admiral Nelson to the coast of Egypt, his confusion was even greater. He promised to begin his defensive preparations immediately. The English officers, left to the greatest perplexity, wondered in what waters they had any chance of encountering us. Admiral Nelson became convinced that the conquest of Sicily was the goal of our expedition. Deploring the mistake he had made in sailing his ships past Alexandria, he did not want to waste a moment in making amends. He immediately put out to sea. With the winds blowing from the north-northwest, the English squadron set sail to port. As it moved northeast, the French fleet, coming from the northwest, was rapidly approaching the coast of Egypt.

III

At daybreak on July 1, the French fleet sighted Alexandria. A few hours later, it dropped anchor near Marabout Cove, two and a half leagues from land.³⁵⁸

French traders, who had managed to elude the Arab surveillance, came aboard the *Orient*. They informed General Bonaparte that an English squadron had appeared three days earlier off the city. This news was very serious. The enemy could reappear. Now, the French fleet was in a disadvantageous position to give battle. If the fortunes of war were against it, what would become of the convoy? The breeze was fresh and the sea rough. Despite these unfavorable circumstances, the order was given to begin the landing. The general officers were called aboard the *Orient*. If the enemy was reported, should they wait at anchor or go out to meet them? This was the question Admiral Brueys put to them. Admiral Blanquet du Chayla insisted very strongly that the French squadron should fight under sail. Rear-Admiral Villeneuve, commanding one of the squadron's divisions, and the chief of staff, Division Chief Ganteaume, expressed an opposing opinion. The Commander-in-Chief agreed with their opinion. It was, therefore, decided that the battle should be received at anchor. Orders were given for the fleet to form a line of embankment. Most of the ships set sail for the posts assigned to them. The army marched all night. The next day, several thousand men, exhausted and almost without cartridges, attacked Alexandria and captured it. Admiral Brueys, having made the mistake of not blocking the port, some merchant ships and many local boats escaped. There was especially reason to regret the latter, who would have been very useful to us in putting the equipment embarked on the ships ashore.³⁵⁹

The prompt possession of Alexandria was a matter of the utmost importance not only for the expedition but also for the navy. The transport ships now had assured shelter. They entered the harbor, followed by a few frigates and corvettes armed for war. Division Commander Perrée, leaving the *Mercure*, which he commanded, led two Maltese galleys, the bombards, and the gunboats, to Alexandria. With this flotilla, he was to support the army's operations.

On July 2, the most difficult part of this great undertaking was completed. We were in a position to strike a blow at this enemy whom, despite the fierceness of the struggle, we had been unable to reach since 1793. All our efforts to deploy troops in Ireland had been in vain. Our fleets, poorly equipped in terms of personnel and equipment, had been dispersed by the storm or driven back by the enemy. Admiral Brueys had had the good fortune to arrive at his destination without being disturbed. We had committed a serious imprudence in sailing a convoy of four hundred sails across the Mediterranean, when we were not masters of the sea. Happy accidents had preserved us from the consequences of this fault. Malta was ours. Thirty-six thousand soldiers commanded by Generals Kléber, Desaix, Régnier, Murat, with General Bonaparte at their head, were treading the soil of Egypt. We were threatening British power in India and the Mediterranean. It was important not to compromise this success. The greatest efforts had to be made to preserve our squadron, whose cooperation was necessary for the army. The English maintained considerable forces at sea, but the demands they had to meet were great.³⁶⁰

The demands they had to satisfy were great. The alliance, contracted with Spain, kept Admiral Jervis off Cadiz. Our establishment in Egypt and the occupation of Malta would require the English not only to maintain considerable forces in the Mediterranean, but also to send ships to India and the Red Sea. Resupplying the army, connecting it with the mother country, supporting, circumstances permitting, military operations on the Syrian coast, and influencing the decisions of the Porte through its presence—such was the mission assigned to our squadron. Could it fulfill it? Given the superiority of the enemy, it is difficult to say for sure. In any case, Admiral Brueys had to neglect nothing to remain able to play the role assigned to him by events.

General Bonaparte understood the importance of the squadron only too well to allow it to be compromised. On July 3, he ordered Admiral Brueys to enter the Old Port of Alexandria, if he found enough water in the passes for this operation to be carried out without danger. Division Chief Ganteaume, head of the general staff, received orders to supervise the sounding work. Finally, the general asked to be informed whether the squadron, embedded in the harbor of Aboukir, would be able to defend itself against an enemy of superior force. If the entrance to the Old Port was not practicable, and if, on the other hand, the squadron could not take up a safe position in the harbor of Aboukir, the admiral was to make way for Corfu, after having disembarked the artillery. He would leave in Alexandria the ships *Dubois*, *Causse*, the frigates *Diane*, *Junon*, *Alceste*, *Arthémise*, the entire light flotilla and the equipment necessary to arm these different vessels.³⁶¹

Thus, on July 3, the admiral knew General Bonaparte's intentions. He could, at his discretion, enter Alexandria, anchor at Aboukir, or head for Corfu. Anticipating a last resort, the general ordered the admiral to proceed immediately to the latter port, even though he still had army belongings on his ships, if he had reason to fear the unexpected appearance of a superior English squadron off Alexandria.

These instructions were unambiguous. The expedition leader's wish was for the squadron to reach a safe anchorage. Far from sacrificing the interests of the navy, General Bonaparte anticipated what it might desire. If Admiral Brueys had not received such orders, it would have been his duty to provoke them. Could the squadron anchor in the Old Port? That was the first question to be resolved. The pilots consulted replied that the greatest depth in the passes did not go beyond twenty-two and a half feet. Now, this figure represented the draft of the seventy-four-gun vessels. Consequently, these, that is to say, the smallest vessels in the fleet, were not in the required condition to enter Alexandria. The admiral ordered new soundings to be made. He entrusted this mission to the commander of the *Alceste*, Frigate Captain Barré. While waiting for this work to be completed, he decided to lead his ships into the bay of Aboukir. There, he proposed to look for, in concert with officers of the engineers and artillery, detached on this point, positions on land which would be fortified and on which he would support his line of embossment.³⁶²

This plan was, in reality, the one that suited Admiral Brueys, as he felt a very understandable reluctance to confine himself to the port of Alexandria where he could be blockaded by inferior forces. On July 8, the squadron dropped anchor in Aboukir Bay. Although the troops had been disembarked for eight days, there was still equipment belonging to the army on our ships. The admiral intended to ship it to Alexandria on the local patrol boats and ships. On July 18, the admiral received the report from the commander of the *Alceste*, who was tasked, as we have said, with sounding the passes of the Old Port. The conclusions of this work were very precise. "My final opinion," Frigate Captain Barré told the admiral, "is that the vessels can pass with the usual precautions, which you know better than I do." He added that the beacons and signals were in place. Consequently, the operation could begin as soon as the admiral deemed it appropriate. The admiral was not satisfied. He ordered Frigate Captain Barré to continue his search, expressing the hope that he would find, in the space between the Marabout Tower and the eastern coast, a new channel deeper than the first.

It is difficult to understand the admiral's hesitations and the delays he is taking in resolving such an important question. What was written to him about the vessels entering the Old Port does not seem to have made a very clear impression on his mind. When he is given a glimpse of the possibility of bringing his ships into the port of Alexandria, he is concerned about the difficulty of leaving it.³⁶³

If this difficulty, which was known from the start, constituted an absolute obstacle in his eyes, it was better not to waste time looking for a channel. The admiral urged Commander Barré to continue his search. He ended the letter he wrote to him by saying: "When your work is finished, it will be necessary for you to inform the commander-in-chief, and, by sending him an exact plan of your soundings, you will share with him your thoughts on the quality of the vessels that can be allowed to enter the Old Port with the certainty of not risking them." One feels genuine surprise when reading this last paragraph. The admiral, having received very clear orders, no longer had to address the commander-in-chief. This, moreover, was a regrettable waste of time. Twenty days had passed since the squadron's arrival off Alexandria. Supplies were dwindling rapidly. Finally, two frigates had appeared off Aboukir. They had hoisted the French flag, but there was no doubt that they were English. Before long, our presence in the bay would be known to the enemy. The time for hesitation was over. If the admiral, after reading Captain Barré's report, did not want to enter Alexandria, he would have to leave for Corfu.

The commander-in-chief, convinced that the French squadron was safe in Alexandria, wrote from Cairo on July 27 to Admiral Brueys. "I have received word from Alexandria that you have finally found a pass such as one could wish for, and that at this very moment you are in the port with your squadron. You should have no worries about the provisions necessary for your army." General Bonaparte had not received, since his departure from Alexandria, any of the letters addressed to him by the admiral.³⁶⁴

Nevertheless, he considered the fleet's entry into the Old Port as a *fait accompli*, because he knew the conclusions of the work undertaken by Frigate Captain Barré. This was the state of affairs when Admiral Brueys's letters reached General Bonaparte. The latter learned that the squadron was still at Aboukir. But, on the other hand, as he received, at the same time, the second report from Frigate Captain Barré, a report that this officer, in compliance with Admiral Brueys's orders, dated July 20, sent directly to him, he once again assumed that the squadron was in the Old Port. On July 30, he wrote to the admiral: "I have just received, and all at once, your letters from July 13 to the 26. The news I received from Alexandria on the success of the soundings makes me hope that by now you will have entered the port. I also think that the *Causse* and the *Dubois* are armed for war in such a way as to be able to be in line if you were attacked; for after all, two additional vessels are not to be neglected." Probably fearing that, as a result of some further delay, the squadron would still be at Aboukir, the commander-in-chief ended his letter by saying: "Whatever happens, we must quickly enter the port of Alexandria." Thus, General Bonaparte did not lose sight of the link which united the navy to his army. He showed himself constantly concerned about the safety of the squadron.

Admiral Brueys did not seem to understand that he had to, in the interest of the expedition, gain a safe anchorage. General Bonaparte's letters, dated July 27 and 30, did not reach him.³⁶⁵

On August 1, as we will see later, the French squadron no longer existed, and its leader had met a glorious death in the Battle of Aboukir.

IV

On July 19, Admiral Nelson anchored in the port of Syracuse to take on water and supplies. Five days later, he put back to sea. Reliable intelligence had informed him of the true purpose of our expedition. On August 1, the English arrived in sight of Alexandria. Two ships, the *Alexander* and the *Swifture*, which were marching ahead of the fleet, reported that the French squadron was not in the port. Amid a large number of merchant ships, only two vessels and six frigates or corvettes were visible. The English were once again disappointed in their hopes of encountering our fleet when the captain of the *Zealous* signaled that seventeen warships were anchored in line, close to land, east of Alexandria. The English immediately changed course and headed towards these vessels. The French squadron was anchored in the western part of Aboukir Bay. Our ships, arranged in a single line, were placed in the following order: The *Guerrier*, the *Conquérant*, the *Spartiate*, the *Aquilon* and the *Peuple - Souverain*, of seventy-four, the *Franklin*, of eighty, the *Orient*, of one hundred and twenty, the *Tonnant*, of eighty, the *Heureux* and the *Mercure*, of seventy-four, the *Guillaume - Tell*, of eighty, the *Généreux* and the *Timoléon*, of seventy-four.³⁶⁶

From the *Guerrier* to the *Tonnant*, each ship relieved its forward sailor in the northwest. The last five vessels formed a line whose direction was northwest-quarter-north and southeast-quarter-south. The lead vessel, the *Guerrier*, anchored in thirty feet of water, was a mile and a half from the islet of Aboukir. Each vessel was facing northwest and southeast. The distance between the vessels was one hundred and fifty meters. If the enemy appeared, each ship was instructed to drop a second anchor and put a rope on its forward sailor. The squadron was three miles from the coast. The frigates *Diane*, flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Décrès, *Justice*, *Sérieuse*, and *Arthémise* were anchored between the land and the squadron. Two mortars and four twelve-pounder cannons had been placed on the islet of Aboukir. However, experiments conducted on the range of these guns showed that neither bombs nor cannonballs reached the head of our line. This battery could therefore be of no use, unless we thought it would impose on the enemy.

On August 1st, we had not a single ship outside the bay. The frigate, which was performing this service, had returned to anchor because it had neither water nor biscuits. The shortage of provisions was such that several ships had only six days' worth of food. Supplies, consisting mainly of rice, had arrived at Rosetta, but they had not yet been taken by the squadron. The longboats and large boats with men on duty were on land to take on water.³⁶⁷

Finally, twenty-five men, per ship, formed the garrison of a camp established near the watering hole to protect the workers against Arab attacks. Around two o'clock in the afternoon, the enemy was sighted; the ship *L'Heureux* reported twelve sails to the west. The longboats and boats were recalled; the frigates sent most of their crews aboard the vessels. The admiral, as if planning to sail, gave the order to rig the topgallants. An hour later, he announced that his intention was to fight at anchor (1). He ordered that the arrangements indicated in advance be made in case the enemy intended to attack the army at anchor. Unfortunately, the longboats and large boats, without which these measures could not be carried out, were ashore, and it would be a long time before they returned. The day was drawing on; moreover, the *Alexander* and the *Swifture* were still far away. Admiral Brueys became convinced that the enemy would postpone its attack until the next day. Hence, a lack of clarity and precision in the orders, which, combined with the lack of resources, meant that the arrangements prescribed to rectify the anchorage line were not completely executed.

1. The admirals commanding the squadrons had gone on board the *Orient*, at the moment of the enemy's appearance, to take the admiral's last orders. The question of setting sail was examined. Admiral Blanquet du Chayla insisted very strongly that the squadron should set sail. Rear-Admiral Villeneuve and the chief of staff, Division Chief Ganteaume, were of the opposite opinion. Admiral Brueys, very ill, very overwhelmed, and very undecided, agreed with them. (Report by Mr. de la Chadenède, ensign, attached to the staff of Admiral Brueys.) Rear-Admiral Blanquet du Chayla had always been of the opinion of setting sail and going to meet the enemy, which would at least have prevented such a disastrous defeat; but there is reason to believe that the admiral did not adhere to his opinion, knowing that several vessels did not have their full crews and consequently were in little condition to fight under sail. (Report by Mr. Chabert, lieutenant on the *Orient*.)³⁶⁸

The English squadron, favored by a pleasant north-northwest breeze, advanced rapidly; eleven vessels had been sighted at first. Shortly after, behind these vessels, appeared the *Culloden*, with a brig in tow, the *Alexander*, and the *Swifture*. At three o'clock, Admiral Nelson signaled his fleet to prepare for battle. According to his order, each vessel stood ready to drop an anchor astern. The admiral warned his captains that he would attack the vanguard and center of our fleet. At four o'clock, the English were ten miles northwest of our anchorage. The brig the *Railleur* went to meet the enemy. Arriving within cannon range, it gave chase in the direction of the shallows, located in the north-northeast of the islet of Aboukir. The English were not fooled by this ruse. They continued their route without approaching land. At five thirty, the enemy vessels rounded the reefs onto which the French brig wanted to lead them. An Arab boat, which the *Railleur* had chased in vain, approached the *Vanguard*. This vessel lay up to wait for it. Admiral Nelson, after communicating with this boat, resumed his original course. The English squadron, which had sailed until then without observing orders, formed a very close line. It was arranged as follows: the *Goliath*, *Zealous*, *Orion*, *Audacious*, *Theseus*, *Vanguard*, *Minotaur*, *Defence*, *Bellerophon*, *Majestic* and *Leander*. With the exception of the last ship, which carried only fifty guns, all the others were ships of seventy-four.³⁶⁹

It will be recalled that Admiral Nelson had his flag on the *Vanguard*. At 5:00, the mortar battery established on the islet of Aboukir fired a few bombs. None of them hit the English ships.

At 6:15, the French hoisted their colors. Admiral Brueys, having given the order to fire on the enemy as soon as they came within range, the *Conquérant* and the *Guerrier* opened fire on the *Goliath*; this ship passed forward of the leader of our line. He fired an enfilade broadside; then, letting it approach, he dropped his anchor from the stern using the port davit of the *Guerrier*. This anchor did not hold. The *Goliath* continued to run ahead and only stopped abeam of the *Conquérant*. The *Zealous* followed the *Goliath* and took, by the port davit of the *Guerrier*, the place that the *Goliath* had been unable to hold. The *Orion*, passing over the bow of the *Warrior* and ashore the *Goliath* and the *Zealous*, anchored abeam of the *Spartiate*. The *Audacious* passed the *Guerrier* from the bow; the *Theseus* steered its course between the *Guerrier* and the *Conquérant*. The first of these ships attacked the *Peuple-Souverain* and the second the *Aquilon*. The ship on board Admiral Nelson did not cross the line. Neglecting the *Guerrier* and the *Conquérant*, crushed by the successive broadsides of the ships preceding it, the *Vanguard* dropped anchor abeam of the *Spartiate*, the third ship in the French line. The *Minotaur* and the *Defence* fought the *Aquilon* and the *Peuple-Souverain* offshore. Although the battle had barely begun, the success of Admiral Nelson's maneuver was complete. The *Bellerophon* and the *Majestic*, which came after the *Vanguard*, instead of uniting against the same enemy, separated.³⁷⁰

The *Bellerophon* anchored abeam of the *Orient* and the *Majestic* fought the *Tonnant*. A little after eight o'clock, the *Bellerophon*, completely disabled, cut its cable. It drifted along the line, receiving a broadside from the ships anchored astern of the *Tonnant*. The English vessel dropped anchor at the end of the bay. The *Tonnant's* fire quickly ravaged the *Majestic*, whose captain was killed half an hour after the action began. The *Heureux*, positioned astern of the *Tonnant*, fired its chase guns at the *Majestic*. Around eight o'clock, the English vessel, having run ahead, jammed its main jib bowsprit into the *Heureux's* fore-sail shrouds. It was close enough to this vessel for Captain Etienne to call the boarding divisions on deck. The English vessel cut its stern cable, passed alongside the *Heureux*, with which it exchanged a few broadsides, then dropped a davit anchor. When it was standing to windward, it found itself abreast of the *Mercure's* port side. Action immediately ensued between these two vessels. The *Heureux* fired back at the *Majestic*; it also fought a vessel that dropped anchor abeam. Captains Cambon and Etienne were wounded.

The *Timoléon*, the *Généreux*, and the *Guillaume-Tell* were unopposed. At a quarter past eight, Captain Léonce Trullet of the *Timoléon*, impatient to get under fire, had his topsails hoisted. This brave officer, filled with regret upon seeing the immobility of the rearguard, hoped, by this maneuver, to provoke an order to sail, which unfortunately Admiral Villeneuve did not think to give him.³⁷¹

In the report drawn up on the occasion of the loss of the *Timoléon*, we read: "At a quarter past eight, Captain Trullet, commander of this vessel, impatient with its insignificance, when half the French line was engaged, ordered the topsails to be hoisted to show his desire that the signal be given to him to sail to rescue the leading vessels."

Night had fallen. The English had hoisted four horizontally placed lanterns from the mizzen topsail as a recognition signal. Three vessels, *Culloden*, *Alexander*, and *Swiftsure*, had remained behind. The *Culloden* ran aground on the shallows of the islet of Aboukir. The *Alexander* and the *Swiftsure*, guided by the Culloden's fire, passed off the reef. They entered the bay, seeking, by the light of the cannonade, their place of combat. The *Swiftsure* anchored abeam of the *Franklin*. The *Alexander* became the adversary of the *Orient*. The *Leander*, joining this vessel, took up position to strike the French three-decker from the bow. The *Orient*, which had already forced the *Bellerophon* to leave the battlefield, retaliated vigorously against these new adversaries. Around eight o'clock, Admiral Brueys, wounded in the head and hand, did not leave his post; he did not even allow his wounds to be bandaged. At half past eight, his left leg was blown off by a cannonball. The wound was mortal. To the officers who surrounded him and were preparing to lower him to the wounded station, he said that he wanted to die on the deck of his ship. Shortly after, he expired. One of the survivors of this great disaster, attached to the general staff, wrote later: "At eight o'clock, the admiral was wounded in the head and hand."³⁷²

He refused to be bandaged; he simply wiped away the blood flowing from his wounds with his handkerchief. At eight-thirty, his left thigh was blown off. We surrounded him; the quartermaster received him in his arms. Although he could not recover from his wound, we wanted to have him taken to the wounded station, but he told us to leave him, that he wanted to die on deck. He died with the same peace of mind he had maintained while fighting. The flag captain, Division Commander Casabianca, was wounded.

At the moment when the enemy launched its attack on the ships of the first squadron, our advance guard was almost completely crushed. At nine o'clock, the *Conquérant* left the line and ceased firing. Out of a complement of four hundred men, she counted one hundred and twenty-five dead and eighty-five wounded. She was an old ship that should not have left the arsenal of Toulon. Instead of carrying, like the seventy-fours, twenty-four and eighteen, she had eighteen-pounder guns in her lower battery and twelve-pounder guns in her second battery. Her crew was incomplete. The *Conquérant*, after having received the broadsides of enfilade of the ships that had crossed the line astern, had fought two seventy-fours, the *Goliath* and the *Audacious*. The *Aquilon*, whose adversaries were the *Theseus* and the *Minotaur*, succumbed at nine thirty. The armament of the upper battery on board the *Minotaur* consisted of a number of thirty-two carronades. The effect of this artillery, at close range, had been disastrous. The French vessel had 300 men out of action, 87 killed and 213 wounded. Commander Thévenard was among the dead.³⁷³

Shortly after, the *Peuple-Souverain*, a ship that could not use its own artillery without sustaining damage, lowered its flag. It had lent abeam to the *Defence* and the *Orion*. The *Peuple-Souverain*, completely dismasted, had three feet of water in the hold. Its losses, out of a crew of barely 500 men, amounted to 96 killed and 125 wounded. The *Guerrier*, the leader of the French line, was one of three vessels that the authorities of Toulon, through a most regrettable excess of zeal, had imposed on Admiral Brueys' fleet. She had received, within pistol range, the broadsides of the *Goliath*, the *Orion*, and the *Theseus*. The battle had not been engaged for a quarter of an hour before she had already lost most of her masts. This unfortunate vessel lowered her flag a little before ten o'clock. She seemed to have no bow anymore. On the port side, at some points, several gun ports merged into one.

The English, as the ships of our vanguard ceased their fire, rushed ahead and attacked the ships of our center. Such was the situation when a terrible accident put the final touches to the misfortunes of our army. Fire broke out aboard the *Orient*. The blaze spread with frightening rapidity. Around nine thirty, the loss of the ship could be considered certain. Both sides ceased firing. In both squadrons, the captains prepared to fight the fire which appeared to them to be a formidable consequence of the explosion of the *Orient*. The position of the admiral's two sailors, the *Franklin* and the *Tonnant*, was particularly serious. The first, which was to windward, could do nothing for its own safety.³⁷⁴

The captain of the *Tonnant* did not want to abandon his post. However, when the *Orient* was in flames, he decided to cut his cable. The *Heureux*, on which the *Tonnant* was drifting, cut its own. The *Mercure*, boarded by the *Heureux*, performed the same maneuver. The *Guillaume-Tell*, the *Généreux*, and the *Timoléon*, seeing the ships ahead of them approaching rapidly, cut their cables and moved away. The *Tonnant*, after anchoring, found itself near the *Majestic*.

The fire continued to devour the *Orient*. The crew made futile efforts to fight it. The pumps were broken, the buckets overturned and covered with debris. When all hope of saving the ship had disappeared, the chief of staff gave the order to drown the gunpowder. The able-bodied men threw themselves into the sea. Some swam to the enemy ships, others clung to the sections of masts and yards floating along the shore. The boats, which had not been destroyed by the English fire, received a few men. The *Orient* sank at ten o'clock. The wounded and most of the men who had sought refuge in the wreckage surrounding the ship perished in this great disaster. "I threw myself into the sea through a gun port with Adjutant General Motard," wrote an officer attached to the staff of Admiral Brueys after this event. Although I couldn't swim, I reached a main topsail yard, where I waited for the explosion. Nearly four hundred men had also sought refuge on the masts surrounding the ship. At a quarter past ten it exploded.³⁷⁵

We were all submerged, and only sixty of us were able to return to the water and found more wreckage on which they sought refuge. These timbers were attached by some rope to the sunken carcass of the *Orient*, and we remained, until daybreak, on these floating debris fixed in the same place. For five hours, we were exposed to the cannonade of the French rearguard; we had eight men killed and several wounded." M. Chabert, lieutenant of the *Orient*, who escaped this disaster, made a report in which he said: "Having left the ship after seeing it completely abandoned, I barely had time to get onto the foremast yard, which had fallen into the sea half-burned, when I was suddenly enveloped in a dark whirlwind and carried away with extraordinary speed along with the yard to which I had tied myself. After wandering for some time in this dark chaos, I felt almost suffocated by a column of water into which I was thrown. But fortunately, having managed to get going, I reappeared on the water after much effort and landed on the wreckage of the unfortunate vessel."

The explosion of the *Orient* caused the beginnings of a fire on several French and English ships, which was quickly extinguished. The fighting, temporarily interrupted, resumed with renewed vivacity. The first cannon shots were fired by the *Franklin*. The ships which had fought our advance guard crowded around this ship and the *Spartiate*. Ten ships surrounded them. The *Spartiate*, whose crew barely reached the number of five hundred men, had not been able, at the beginning of the action, to arm all her guns. This ship fought with the greatest energy, but soon she had only two guns left in a state of firing.³⁷⁶

It ceased firing. At 11:30, boats from the *Vanguard* boarded it. Resistance being impossible, the *Spartiate* surrendered to the English. This ship had nine feet of water in its hold; its foremast, the only one it still had, was about to fall. It had 214 men disabled, 64 killed, and 150 wounded. The commander was among the latter. Around midnight, the *Franklin*, after an admirable defense, lowered its flag. This ship had only three guns left in working order, and two-thirds of its crew were disabled. Admiral Blanquet-Duchayla and his flag captain were among the wounded. After the surrender of the *Franklin*, one ship was still fighting: the *Tonnant*. Although the *Sérieuse* had, by order of Admiral Brueys, given it one hundred and fifty men, it had not been able to arm its battery of forecastles. The action had been underway for two hours when the brave captain of the *Petit-Thouars* had his foot blown off and his leg fractured. Shortly afterward, he died. The spirit of this intrepid leader animated the crew. Although already weakened by a struggle of several hours, officers and sailors showed no discouragement. The *Tonnant* exchanged rapid broadsides with the *Alexander* and the *Majestic*. Around one o'clock in the morning, the *Majestic* lost its mainmast and its mizzenmast. Shortly afterward, the three lower masts of the *Tonnant* were cut at deck height. The French ship paid out its cable and moved away in the direction of the *Guillaume-Telle*. His opponents not having followed him, silence fell in the bay.³⁷⁷

The rearguard was in the greatest disorder. The *Guillaume-Tell*, the *Généreux*, and the *Timoléon* were anchored astern and far from the position they had occupied at the beginning of the action. The *Heureux* and the *Mercure* had, as seen above, cut their cables to get away from the *Tonnant* as the vessel drifted towards them. When Lieutenant Foucaud, who had replaced Captain Etienne of the *Heureux*, tried to anchor, it was discovered that the only anchor remaining on the davit had been broken by cannonballs. A few sails were set to keep the vessel athwartships until a new anchor could be set. At three o'clock in the morning, the ship ran aground. The *Mercure* fared no better. At three-thirty, it ran aground near the *Heureux*. Its rudder was dismantled and it no longer had an anchor. Rear-Admiral Decrès went on board the *Heureux* and the *Mercure* in order to hasten, by his presence, the launching of these two vessels. Recognizing that there was no way to achieve this result, he moved away, leaving the two captains free to maneuver. They found themselves unable to evacuate and set fire to their vessels. The boats of both vessels had been destroyed by enemy fire. At four o'clock in the morning, the *Guillaume-Tell*, the *Généreux* and the *Timoléon* exchanged cannonballs with the *Alexander*, the *Majestic*, the *Theseus* and the *Goliath*. At six o'clock the *Goliath*, the *Theseus* and the *Alexander*, joined by the *Leander*, headed towards the *Heureux* and the *Mercure*. After a short engagement, these two vessels lowered their flags. The *Heureux*, badly damaged, had nine feet of water in the hold. We cannot give the number of dead and wounded, which is not indicated in the report relating the loss of this vessel.³⁷⁸

The *Mercure* had only six guns left in working order. The number of killed was 105 and the number of wounded 148. Captain Cambon and all the officers, with the exception of one, were among the latter.

At seven o'clock in the morning, the frigate *Justice* headed out to sea. The *Zealous*, which was under sail, having gone to meet this frigate, the latter returned to its anchorage near the *Guillaume-Tell*, the *Généreux*, and the *Timoléon*. The English vessel dropped anchor near the *Bellerophon*, anchored at the bottom of the bay. The French colors were flying only on four ships, the *Tonnant*, the *Timoléon*, the *Guillaume-Tell* and the *Généreux*, and on two frigates, the *Diane* and the *Justice*. The broadsides of the *Orion* had sunk the *Sérieuse*; the crew of the *Arthémise* had taken refuge on land after setting fire to this frigate. The avisos, two bombards and some transport ships had left the battlefield during the night. These ships had dropped anchor, close to land, under the protection of the fort of Aboukir. Lieutenant Bréart came on board the *Guillaume-Tell* to inform Admiral Villeneuve of the situation of the *Tonnant*, which he had commanded since the death of the division commander of the *Petit-Thouars*. This ship, razed of all its masts, was sinking. It had barely any guns left in a state of firing. Finally, it had 260 men out of action, 110 killed and 150 wounded. The *Timoléon* had not played the role of the *Tonnant*, and it was not in the same situation. Nevertheless, it had numerous damages in its masts and its rigging was chopped.³⁷⁹

The *Guillaume-Tell* and the *Généreux* were the only ones fit to put to sea.

Rear Admiral Villeneuve, leaving the captains of the *Tonnant* and the *Timoléon* free to maneuver, gave the signal to sail. At eleven o'clock, the *Guillaume-Tell*, the *Généreux*, the *Diane*, flying the flag of Rear Admiral Decrès, and the *Justice* set sail. A few cannonballs were exchanged with the *Theseus*. This vessel was recalled by Admiral Nelson, who had no ships in position to support it. The French division, after tacking for three-quarters of an hour to round Rosetta Point, reached the open sea. It headed for Malta. Immediately after the *Guillaume-Tell's* departure, the *Timoléon* ran aground. Captain Trullet sent an officer to Rosette to request boats. When they arrived, he disembarked his crew, who left with arms and ammunition. After being evacuated, the *Timoléon* was burned. The *Tonnant* no longer had any lifeboats. Lieutenant Bréart was therefore unable, like Captain Trullet, to take advantage of the respite given him by the enemy to put the crew ashore and deliver his ship to the flames. It must be believed that his captain found no way, either by himself or by signaling the *Timoléon*, to inform the authorities at Rosette of his situation. In any case, the *Tonnant*, with its colors unfurled, awaited events. Ordered to surrender on the 2nd, Lieutenant Bréart proposed a capitulation. He demanded that the English undertake to send the crew back to France. This condition was not accepted. On the 3rd, the *Theseus* and the *Leander* anchored near the *Tonnant* ready to begin firing.³⁸⁰

All resistance being impossible, the *Tonnant* lowered its flag.

The ships that had taken refuge under the guns of Fort Aboukir set sail on the night of the 2nd. They passed between the island and the mainland and reached Alexandria. The brigs *Salamis* and *Railleur* headed to join the *Guillaume-Tell*. The *Salamis* encountered it off the island of Rhodes. Admiral Villeneuve sent this brig to Alexandria with his dispatches.

Such was the battle of Aboukir. Of the thirteen vessels comprising our squadron, nine fell into enemy hands. The *Orient* blew up, and the *Timoléon* was set ablaze by its crew. In the battle of August 1, 1798, the British squadron suffered 218 killed and 678 wounded. These losses were distributed as follows: the *Goliath* 21 killed, 41 wounded; the *Zealous* 1 killed, 7 wounded; the *Orion* 13 killed, 29 wounded; the *Audacious* 1 killed, 35 wounded; the *Theseus* 5 killed, 30 wounded; the *Vanguard* 30 killed, 76 wounded; the *Minotaur* 23 killed, 64 wounded; the *Defence* 4 killed, 11 wounded; the *Bellerophon* 49 killed, 148 wounded; the *Majestic* 50 killed, 143 wounded; the *Swiftsure* 7 killed, 22 wounded; the *Alexander* 14 killed, 58 wounded; and the *Leander* 40 wounded. Some of the figures mentioned above call for attention. Two English ships, the *Bellerophon* and the *Majestic*, suffered serious losses. The first fought the *Orient*, and the second was the principal adversary of the *Tonnant*. Then come the *Vanguard*, the *Minotaur* and the *Goliath*.³⁸¹

Aboard the other vessels, the number of men hit by our fire is out of all proportion to the results achieved by the enemy. The *Zealous*, the *Orion*, the *Audacious*, the *Theseus*, the *Defence*, the *Swiftsure*, the *Alexander*, and the *Leander* each had barely a few men killed or wounded. However, these vessels played an important role. Not only did they contribute to the destruction of our vanguard, but they also brought about the surrender of the *Tonnant*, the *Mercure*, and the *Heureux*, and made it impossible for the *Timoléon* to follow the *Guillaume-Tell* and the *Généreux*. Let's take an example. The *Zealous*, after fighting the *Guerrier*, joined the ships surrounding the *Franklin*. Finally, this same vessel exchanged a few broadsides with the *Guillaume-Tell* and the *Généreux*, when these two ships, abandoning the battlefield, headed out to sea. The *Zealous* had one killed and seven wounded. As for its damage, it was reduced to a few holes in its sails. What we have just said about the *Zealous* applies, with no less accuracy, to the ships the *Orion*, the *Audacious*, the *Theseus*, the *Defence*, the *Swiftsure*, the *Alexander* and the *Leander*. These ships, which managed to do us a lot of harm, did not suffer. Our losses are indeed considerable. Six ships, the *Conquérant*, the *Peuple-Souverain*, the *Aquilon*, the *Spartiate*, the *Mercure* and the *Tonnant* have 587 dead and 896 wounded, or 98 dead and 149 wounded per ship. If we apply this average to the ships *Guerrier*, *L'Heureux*, the *Franklin* and the *Timoléon*, whose losses are not known to us, we arrive at a total of 979 dead and 1492 wounded.³⁸²

To this already high figure, we must add the killed and wounded from the *Orient*. Finally, if we take into account the victims caused by the explosion of Admiral Brueys's ship, the Battle of Aboukir cost us nearly 3,500 men, killed, wounded, or drowned.

V

In an encounter with the forces detached in pursuit, Admiral Brueys was bound to be defeated. This was the inevitable consequence of the inferiority of the ships he commanded, both in terms of equipment and personnel. However, the defeat of our squadron could have been either mitigated or aggravated by our own conduct or by the conduct of the enemy. Not only did our adversaries not commit any errors, but they made such arrangements that, even if our forces were equal, they would have secured them significant advantages. On August 1st, the English, upon sighting our ships, covered themselves with sails. Nelson was not mistaken about the lack of solidity of our position. He saw what he could undertake, and as soon as he had formed his plan of attack, he did not lose a moment in executing it. He had no map of Aboukir Bay, night was approaching, and finally, his ships were not all assembled. None of these considerations stopped him. He did not want to give Admiral Brueys time to complete his defensive preparations. The audacity and skill of Admiral Nelson rose to a height that would have been difficult to surpass.³⁸³

The English captains did what was expected of experienced officers, commanding good vessels, manned by trained crews. The captain of the *Goliath* personally contributed to the day's success. By overtaking the lead ship of our force, he gave the British squadron commander's plan a development he had not yet considered. Admiral Nelson intended to anchor off our line. Two English ships, keeping close to each other, would have attacked a French vessel. The first would have fought it by the davit and the second by the quarter. To achieve this result, maneuvering with extreme precision would have been required. Captain Foley, passing in front of the *Guerrier*, a maneuver that was imitated by several English vessels, removed this difficulty. Our ships found themselves between two fires and forced to fight not only on the starboard side but also on the landward side, something for which they were not prepared. On several vessels, the batteries were engaged on the port side. Finally, the weakness of our personnel, in terms of numbers and quality, made a fight on both sides disadvantageous for us.

After outlining the role of the English, we will quickly summarize our own. Upon arriving in Toulon in the first days of April, Admiral Brueys found most of the vessels that were to form his squadron in the harbor. It was easy for him to recognize the poor quality of the elements that made up the squadron. Very lively complaints arose around him; every day, his captains denounced the poor state of their ships. Unless he was deliberately deluding himself, the admiral could not have been unaware of the true state of affairs.³⁸⁴

Instead of protesting vigorously against the conduct of the Toulon port authorities, he had given in to the general trend. He had relied on fortune, that is, on chance, to extricate him from the difficulties he saw, but against which he lacked the courage to fight. At sea, the presence of General Bonaparte, whose responsibility covered his own, and the support that the officers and soldiers of the expeditionary force would have given to the navy in the event of an encounter with the enemy, had revived his confidence. But, after the landing of the troops, when he found himself in the presence of these weakened and uneducated crews, of these ships whose movements were so slow and so difficult, of the *Conquérant*, of the *Peuple-Souverain* and of the *Guerrier*, vessels which had long been unfit to appear in a line of battle, he fell into a deep discouragement. As a result of these various considerations, Admiral Brueys thought that he would expose himself to certain disaster by accepting a fight under sail. It was then that he made the decision to await the English at the anchorage of Aboukir. If the admiral had managed to support the two ends of his line with powerful batteries, his resolution would have been understandable. But, as we have seen, the squadron drew no protection from the land. It is therefore difficult to understand why the admiral was deluded on this point. Our squadron was in the most unfavorable conditions for fighting Admiral Nelson's ships under sail. But was it lessening the enemy's superiority to wait for him at an anchorage where our position presented fewer advantages than if we had been at sea?³⁸⁵

On August 1st, the enemy surprised us. The longboats and boats, which would have been necessary to make the arrangements prescribed by the admiral, did not return. The vessels were deprived of their crews, as well as the men sent ashore to protect the watering hole. On most of the vessels, insufficient personnel prevented the *Gaillards* battery from being manned. The *Orient* was not even able to fully man its third battery. On August 1st, there was not a single vessel keeping watch on the open sea. The English entered the bay a few hours after being reported. Admiral Brueys wrote to General Bonaparte on July 20 that he was not sending ships to the various points of the Mediterranean from which he could have obtained useful information, because he had neither provisions nor spare parts to give them. If this explanation allows us to understand that the admiral did not detach a frigate or a aviso to carry out a mission of some duration, it cannot justify him not having had ships under sail outside the bay. Those that he had employed in this service would not have consumed more provisions than at anchor. As for spare parts, it would not have been impossible to give them what was necessary. There were, in the port of Alexandria, ships, frigates and corvettes armed en flûte. Rather than leave the squadron destitute, it was necessary to take the existing equipment on board these ships. Admiral Brueys was all the more able to do so since his authority, by virtue of a decision taken on June 2 by General Bonaparte, extended over the entire coastline occupied by our troops.

After rounding the islet of Aboukir, the enemy headed towards our vanguard. The route he was following revealed his intentions.³⁸⁶

Admiral Nelson was maneuvering to attack some of our ships with all his forces. Admiral Brueys had no other chance to oppose this plan than by ordering the rearguard and a few ships in the center to sail. If he did not give this order immediately, it seems he should have signaled to prepare to execute it. The *Warrior* and the *Conqueror* fired the first cannon shots at 6:30, and by 7:00, our five leading ships were surrounded by eight English vessels. Admiral Brueys could no longer have any doubts, if he had any until then, about his adversary's plans. His objective was therefore to bring all his forces to the point chosen by the enemy for delivering the battle. Admiral Brueys had foreseen the case where he would believe it necessary to call the vanguard to the aid of the rearguard. Additional signals, relating to this eventuality, had been given to each captain. But the admiral had not assumed that his vanguard would be attacked. He had therefore not prescribed any measures in view of a hypothesis which he regarded as inadmissible. Admiral Nelson's maneuver had therefore taken him by surprise. Nevertheless, by acting with determination, he would have, if not repaired, at least mitigated the consequences of the error he had made. It was still daylight. The admiral gave his first orders by means of signals, and if the *Orient* did not sail, Rear-Admiral Villeneuve, informed by an officer of his intentions, would have led our ships to fire. The breeze was fresh, varying between the northwest and the north-northwest.³⁸⁷

Even if it were blowing in the direction of the anchorage line, the rearguard ships and some of the center's ships, sailing by cutting their cables, as did the *Guillaume-Tell* and the *Généreux* the next day, would have quickly risen to the height of the vanguard. Shortly after the start of the battle, the breeze shifted to the north. Our ships, sailing at the start of the action, would have encountered this change of wind at the moment when, after having run the port tack, they would have headed for the anchorage with their tacks to starboard. Our rearguard would have been able to oppose the junction of the *Alexander*, the *Swiftsure*, and the *Leander* with the main body of the English fleet. She could also have positioned herself offshore of the English ships anchored to the starboard side of our line.

Would our ships have performed their task well? The captains, most of whom were unaccustomed to squadron maneuvers, might have made mistakes, but all our ships would have been under fire, and that was the goal that had to be pursued. The immobility of part of our forces must therefore rightly be blamed on Brueys until the moment when this admiral was no longer able to communicate with his rearguard. This responsibility weighs all the more heavily on him since the beginning of the action was the truly favorable moment to carry out this maneuver. It was then that it had its full value and could bear fruit.

When Admiral Brueys was no longer in a position to act as commander-in-chief, the right to direct the ships placed behind the *Orient* belonged to Rear-Admiral Villeneuve. It is fair to recognize that the rearguard's equipment no longer presented, at this time, the same advantages as at the beginning of the action. Four ships, out of the six which preceded the *Orient*, were almost reduced.³⁸⁸

Having reached the head of our line, Admiral Villeneuve would have found only the *Spartiate* and the *Franklin* flying French colors. If he decided not to join up with the vanguard, he would have had to, at the very least, support the *Tonnant*, anchored a few cables' lengths to his bow. Later, Villeneuve, learning that his conduct at the Battle of Aboukir was being severely criticized, wanted to justify himself. To this end, he sent a letter to Rear-Admiral Blanquet Duchayla in which he explained the reasons that had prevented him from going to the aid of the vanguard. The *Guillaume-Tell*, said the admiral in this letter, had two large anchors at sea, one small one, four hawsers, and he could not "abandon his moorings." Now, during the night of August 1st to 2nd, the *Guillaume-Tell* had abandoned his moorings, the first time around ten o'clock, before the explosion of the *Orient*, and a second time at three o'clock in the morning. Finally, on August 2nd, the *Guillaume-Tell* and the *Généreux* had set sail, cutting their cables.

In his letter to Admiral Duchayla, Admiral Villeneuve also said that the entire night would have passed before the rearguard ships had arrived at the scene of the battle. How could one believe that, with a fresh breeze, even if it had been blowing in the direction of the anchor line, ships would not have risen to windward by a few cables. This was all it took to reach either the *Franklin*, which was the sixth ship in the line, or the *Tonnant*, which was the eighth. Now, the distance separating the *Guillaume-Tell* from the ships *Franklin* and *Tonnant* was four ships in the first case, and two in the second.³⁸⁹

Admiral Villeneuve's report states that the *Guillaume Tell* and the *Généreux* made a three-quarter-hour broadside before rounding Rosetta Point. This is true, but it must be added that these two vessels were, on August 2, at the time of their departure, downwind and far from the position they had occupied the day before. This second objection is no more acceptable than the first. Finally, the admiral says that the thought of setting sail and going to the aid of the engaged vessels did not occur to anyone because it was impracticable. The admiral forgets that Captain Trullet of the *Timoléon* had his topsails hoisted at a quarter past eight, thus demonstrating his feelings about the immobility of the rearguard ships. The truth compels us to say that the considerations presented by Admiral Villeneuve to justify his conduct cannot be accepted.

In summary, the French had ships that, in terms of equipment and personnel, were inferior to those of their adversaries. They also had the misfortune of being poorly commanded. Vice-Admiral Brueys, after the landing of the expeditionary force, must have had only one thought: to withdraw his squadron from the enemy in order to reorganize it. The latter, composed of ships armed, for the most part, in haste, encumbered, since its departure from Toulon, with troops and equipment, had neither strength nor cohesion. The admiral knew that he could not count on the solidity of the general staff to mitigate the weakness of the crews, since he complained, in his letters, of the officers' poor training. Finally, indiscipline reigned in his squadron. There still exists, wrote Admiral Brueys to the minister, "great insubordination in the staffs and in the crews."³⁹⁰

He requested that the military juries established by the law of 1790 be replaced by courts martial. Under these conditions, the admiral had to go to Corfu, as the commander-in-chief had ordered him to do in his letter of July 3. Despite the very specific instructions ordering him to go to Alexandria, if he did not go to Corfu, the admiral again submitted the question to the commander-in-chief. The issue was to decide, based on the soundings made by Captain Barré, whether a vessel could safely enter the Old Port. The decision to be made on this point was a matter for the navy, and the resulting responsibility should legitimately fall to Admiral Brueys.

In his letters to General Bonaparte, we see the admiral passing, in turn, from confidence to discouragement. Sometimes he believes himself able to repel Nelson's attack, sometimes he declares that, in this harbor, he will never be able to take up a military position allowing him to resist an enemy superior in numbers. Although English frigates have come to reconnoiter him, he lulls himself with the hope that he will not be attacked. This feeling, which soon becomes known, becomes that of most of the officers. The squadron loses the stimulus it would have found in the almost certain eventuality of a battle with the English. A month passes during which the crews are employed in continual chores. It is necessary to unload the equipment from the ships and embark it on the small vessels coming from Alexandria. The anchorage is changed and water is taken on. As for military instruction, little attention is paid to it. The admiral, tired and ill, has no authority; his hand is not felt in an energetic manner in any part of the service.³⁹¹

Discipline, already very weak, as we saw above, slackened further. "Subordinates," in the words of a squadron officer, "are bound to their commanders neither by fear nor by trust." On August 1, Admiral Brueys was taken by surprise. His orders, from the moment the enemy was in sight, were not sufficiently clear. The longboats and boats needed to correct the line of embossment were far away and did not rally in a timely manner.

The battle began. We offered no countermeasures to the enemy's skillful dispositions. The *Orient*, set ablaze, was blown up; the *Franklin*, carrying the flag of the commander of the second squadron, was surrounded by the English. Rear-Admiral Villeneuve, who had become the head of the debris of our fleet, saw the ships preceding him destroyed one after the other, and he waited, before fighting, for the enemy to come and attack him. In his letter to Admiral Blanquet Duchayla, Rear-Admiral Villeneuve said that the loss of the squadron was decided at the moment when the English ships were able to overtake us in front." If he had this conviction, unfortunately only too justified, why did he not set sail during the night? If he had set sail after the explosion of the *Orient*, he would have taken, in addition to the *Guillaume-Tell* and the *Généreux*, the *Timoléon* and probably the *Heureux* and the *Mercure*. Admiral Villeneuve had the choice between two parties. To join his comrades in arms and share their fortune, or, if he recognized that the enemy's maneuver condemned us to an irremediable defeat, to have no other concern than to save the part of the squadron which was still intact. The day came without him having made a resolution.³⁹²

The senior command fell short of its task on that fateful night, but the captains, officers, and crews displayed remarkable vigor. Among the vessels that honored themselves most by the stubbornness of their resistance were the *Franklin*, captained by Gilet, flying the flag of Rear Admiral Blanquet Duchayla, and the *Tonnant*, captained by the Petit-Thouars. An order of the day, addressed by General Bonaparte to the army of Egypt, paid fitting tribute to the glorious conduct of the *Tonnant*. "In the naval battle," said the general, "which took place between the English and French squadrons, the ship *Tonnant* covered itself with glory; it fought alone, for thirty-six hours, against the entire squadron." The brave captain of the Petit-Thouars was killed by a cannon shot. Glory to his memory, glory to the entire crew of the *Tonnant*." Unfortunately, the agenda did not end there. The general added: "The *Franklin* lowered its flag without being dismasted and without having received any damage." General Bonaparte had been misinformed about the conduct of the *Franklin*. When Admiral Blanquet Duchayla learned of this agenda, he sent a supporting memorandum to the Minister of the Navy. Vice-Admiral Bruix submitted a report on this affair to the Directory, in which he said: "The commander of the naval forces at Alexandria wrote to me: The ship *Franklin*, which General Blanquet was aboard, not only did its duty, but was even one of those which, of both fleet, made the most splendid resistance. Captain Barré, in a report he had been instructed to make, declared that the only thing left of the *Franklin* was the foremast (without the topmast), which was unusable, since the English had cut it off."³⁹³

This same officer transmits the report of Citizen Emond, brigade commander, commanding the artillery aboard the *Franklin*. It reads as follows: General Blanquet fought as a man of honor until he was wounded seriously enough to lose consciousness. When he regained consciousness, he asked why they were no longer firing; and when they objected that there were only three cannons left in working order, he said: "Well," he said, "keep firing; the last one may be the one that will make us victorious." Captain Barré adds: Citizen Martinet, frigate captain, who surrendered the ship (General Blanquet and Citizen Gilet, his flag captain, being wounded) had received well-deserved praise for his bravery in continuing the fight; and General Ganteaume said, upon his arrival from Aboukir, that the *Franklin* was firing superbly, and that the military dispositions of this vessel were a pleasure to see. Vice-Admiral Bruix, in communicating this report to Admiral Blanquet Duchayla on behalf of the government, expressed the hope that the terms in which it was written would erase the painful impressions that the admiral had experienced.

When Admiral Nelson, rallied on the coast of Provence by the ships sent to him by Lord Jervis, set out in pursuit of the French fleet, he divided his army into three divisions. He intended, with the first two, to fight our squadron. The third division, comprising the *Culloden*, the *Alexander* and the *Swiftsure*, was to throw itself into the middle of the convoy and destroy it. It will be remembered that the English and French squadrons, the first heading south-east and the second east, found themselves very close to each other on the night of June 22.³⁹⁴

What would have happened if, on that night of June 22, the English had learned of the expeditionary fleet? Since our departure, the weather had been fine. Consequently, for more than a month, generals, officers, and soldiers had been practicing the role they were called upon to fulfill in the event of an encounter between the two squadrons. We would have had, on board our ships, well-armed batteries and excellent musketry. Finally, it would have been easy to detach a sufficient number of men for maneuver. Both sides would have fought with the will to win. What would have been the final outcome of the struggle? It is difficult to say, but it can be affirmed that a battle, engaged in such conditions, would not have ended like that of Aboukir. However, if, on August 1, 1798, the French navy suffered a terrible disaster, the honor of the flag emerged safe from this ordeal. The attitude of Admirals Brueys, Blanquet Duchayla, and the division chief of the *Petit-Thouars* was heroic. The ship captains Thévenard, of the *Aquilon*, Casabianca, of the *Orient*, found a glorious death in this combat. Captains Dalbarade, of the *Conquérant*, Emériau, of the *Spartiate*, Thévenard, of the *Peuple-Souverain*, Gilet, of the *Franklin*, Etienne, of the *Heureux*, Cambon, of the *Mercure*, were among the wounded. The officers and crews displayed the greatest energy. Ships, with several hundred men out of action, having only a few cannons left in working order, with no hope of victory, continued the fight against a numerically superior enemy with real determination. The courage of the French squadron was greater than its fortune.³⁹⁵

Admiral Nelson, embarrassed by his prisoners, whom he could not feed, sent them back to Alexandria. Despite their desire to keep all the captured vessels, the English were forced to burn the *Mercure*, the *Heureux*, and the *Guerrier*. On August 14, the *Tonnant*, the *Franklin*, the *Conquérant*, the *Peuple-Souverain*, the *Aquilon*, and the *Spartiate*, hastily repaired, put to sea. They were escorted by the *Orion*, the *Bellerophon*, the *Minotaur*, the *Defence*, the *Audacions*, the *Theseus*, and the *Majestic*. The *Peuple-Souverain* was unable to get past Gibraltar. The others reached, not without difficulty, the ports of Great Britain.

On August 19, Admiral Nelson left for the Bay of Naples with the *Vanguard*, the *Culloden*, and the *Alexander*. The *Leander*, a fifty-gun ship, had set sail on August 5 from Aboukir Bay. Captain Berry, of the *Vanguard*, bearer of Admiral Nelson's dispatches to Lord Jervis, was on board this vessel. The *Leander* was, on the 18th, west of the island of Candia, when its lookouts reported a large vessel. It was the *Généreux*, a seventy-four-gun ship, captained by Lejoille, which had separated from the *Guillaume-Tell* a few days earlier. The *Leander* gave chase, but the French vessel soon joined it. After an engagement lasting several hours, the *Leander* lowered its flag. This vessel, whose defense had been very honorable, had thirty-five men killed and fifty-seven wounded.

Admiral Nelson had left, on the coast of Egypt, a division comprising the ships *Zealous*, *Goliath* and *Swiftsure* and some frigates. All that remained were the ships *Causse* and *Dubois*, the frigates *Alceste*, *Courageuse*, *Leoben*, *Carrère*, *Montenotte*, *Mantoue*, *Junon* and some corvettes and avisos.³⁹⁶

General Bonaparte entrusted command of the navy in Egypt to the former chief of staff of the squadron, Division Commander Ganteaume, who had escaped the disaster at Aboukir. The latter was, shortly after his arrival in Alexandria, promoted to the rank of rear admiral.³⁹⁷

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BOOK XI

Capture of the ship *Hercule*. - Burning of the ship *Quatorze - Juillet*. - Dispatch of Savary's and Bompard's divisions to the Irish coast. - Battle of the *Bayonnaise* and the *Ambuscade*. - Capture, in the Indian Ocean, of the *Prudente*, the *Forte*, and the *Preneuse*, and, in the Antilles, of the *Insurgente*. - Arming at Brest of a squadron of which Vice-Admiral Bruix, Minister of the Navy, takes command. - This admiral, eluding Lord Bridport's surveillance, reaches the open sea. - He arrives off Cadiz. - Bad weather prevents the Spanish from joining the French squadron. - Admiral Bruix enters the Mediterranean. - He leads his ships to Toulon. - The English concentrate at Minorca. - The Spanish surrender at Cartagena. - Admiral Bruix appears before Genoa and Savona. - Admiral Keith, about to join the French squadron, is recalled by Count Saint-Vincent. - Bruix rallies the Spanish at Cartagena. - The combined fleet leaves the Mediterranean. - It goes to Cadiz and from there to Brest. - After having fruitlessly searched for our squadron at different points in the Mediterranean, the English cross the Strait of Gibraltar and appear before Brest. - A division of five ships, under the command of Admiral Meljarejo, anchors in the harbor of the island of Aix. - It repels the attack of an English squadron.. - Admiral Meljarejo brings his ships back to Ferrol. - The *Généreux* at Brindisi. - Death of Captain Lejoille. - The *Généreux* returns to Toulon. - The *Leander* falls into Russian hands. - A division composed of two frigates and two brigs, returning from Egypt, anchors in the harbor of Fréjus. - General Bonaparte is on the Muiron. - An Anglo-Russian army, under the command of the Duke of York, lands at the mouth of the Texel. - The English sign a convention at Castricum, following which they evacuate Holland.

I

At the beginning of 1798, the French navy lost two vessels in the circumstances we will describe. The new vessel, *Hercules*, of seventy-four, after completing its fitting out at Lorient, was ordered to Brest.³⁹⁸

He set sail on April 20, under the command of Captain l'Héritier, to reach his destination. The next day, the *Hercule* was a short distance from the Raz de Sein when several enemy sails were sighted to the south. There was a light, variable breeze from east to north. Shortly after, the lookouts reported other vessels, belonging to Lord Bridport's squadron, to the west-northwest. Despairing, due to the weakness of the breeze, of reaching the Raz de Sein, from which he was still about five miles distant, Commander l'Héritier headed south, hugging the land closely, in order to throw himself ashore if he recognized the impossibility of reaching a safe anchorage. The winds having returned to the east, he headed again for the Raz de Sein. At nightfall, the wind dropped. Commander l'Héritier, unable to stem a very strong ebb current, anchored in seventy fathoms.

He was cradling himself in the hope of escaping his pursuers, when, around nine o'clock, the moon having appeared, a vessel was discovered, the *Mars*, of seventy-four, Captain Alexander Hood. The *Hercule* immediately opened fire on the English vessel. The latter anchored, but having dragged its anchor, it boarded the French vessel. The two vessels remained attached to each other, the *Mars* remaining to starboard of the *Hercule*. Commander l'Héritier ordered the boarding divisions to come on deck. A small number of men having responded to this call, this attempt was not followed up. Fire broke out in the batteries and in the false deck, but it was managed to be brought under control. The fight had already been going on for some time and the losses of the French vessel were considerable.³⁹⁹

From the first volleys, the battle lights had gone out, and much disorder and confusion reigned in the batteries. We have demonstrated the poor quality of the elements that composed the crews of our ships. To this first cause of inferiority, we will add that the *Hercule* was arming for the first time. Finally, this ship had left for Brest twenty-four hours after leaving the port. The *Mars's* armament dated back several years. Its crew was well-versed in all the practices of war and navigation. Under such conditions, although the two vessels were of the same rank, the fight could not be considered equal.

At ten thirty, the *Hercule* lowered its flag. The starboard side was riddled with cannonballs. Out of a crew of six hundred and sixty men, three hundred and eleven were out of action. This figure attested, if not to the skill, at least to the energy of the defense. The report that the commander of the *Hercule* sent to the minister to give him an account of this event ended as follows: "I cannot better convince you, Citizen Minister, of the necessity in which we were to surrender, and make you appreciate the resistance put up by the brave sailors under my orders, than by presenting to you the following picture: eighty-six men killed, two hundred and twenty-five wounded, one hundred and seventy cannonballs both on board and in the body of the vessel and in the masts, sixteen cannons dismantled, the rudder bar, decks and cables crossed in several places, five bends, six shrouds and five shroud chains cut, the capstan broken, part of the pumps broken or dismantled, all the rooms chopped up and fire on board, etc. ..." ⁴⁰⁰

It was only in fine weather and with the greatest precautions that the English managed to bring the *Hercule* to Plymouth. Captain l'Héritier, struck by a pike during the battle, died in England from his wound. After receiving his report on the battle of April 21, the Minister of the Navy, Admiral Bruix, congratulated him, on behalf of the government, on his conduct. In this battle, in which only artillery had played a role, our adversaries' losses were much lower than ours. The English had thirty dead instead of ninety and sixty wounded instead of two hundred and twenty-five. The captain of the *Mars*, wounded shortly after the start of the battle, died just as it was ending.

An accident in the port of Lorient, a few days after the battle between the *Mars* and the *Hercule*, took the seventy-four-gun *Quatorze - Juillet* from the French navy. On the night of April 29, fire broke out on board the vessel, which was finishing its fitting out in the port. The fire spread so rapidly that all efforts to stop its progress were ineffective. The easterly wind and the ebb tide fortunately allowed the *Quatorze - Juillet* to be beached on the sands of Kernevel. The vessel was engulfed in flames. The cause of the fire was never determined. The former Minister of the Navy, Dalbarade, who had become a rear admiral, was commander of the weapons at Lorient. On September 11, 1798, he appeared before a court martial, which declared him "unable to command, as convicted of negligence and slackness in service."⁴⁰¹

The Directory renewed the attempts already made to send troops, weapons, and munitions to Ireland. On August 6, 1798, Division Commander Savary left the Isle of Aix with the frigates *Concorde*, a forty-four-gun ship, *Franchise*, and *Médée*, each carrying a corps of twelve hundred men, commanded by General Humbert. The French division had the good fortune to pass unseen by the English cruisers. On the 21st, the troops were put ashore, and our ships put back to sea. All anchored on September 5 at the entrance to the Gironde. On the 16th, a second division, carrying three thousand soldiers, set sail from Brest. It included the *Hoche*, of seventy-four, and the frigates *Immortalité*, *Romaine* and *Loire* of forty-four, the *Embuscade*, *Bellone*, *Coquille*, *Sémillante* and *Résolue* of thirty-six. On the 17th, during the day, several enemy frigates appeared; one of them headed towards the coast of Ireland to inform the English cruise of our sortie. Commander Bompard chased away the ships that were observing him. Unable to reach them, he tried, by taking false routes, to deceive them about the purpose of the expedition. His efforts were in vain. The English frigates kept within sight of our ships. Commander Bompard decided to set sail for his true destination. Arriving near the coast of Ireland, the French division was sighted by Commodore Sir Borlase Warren's squadron, composed of the eighty-gun ships *Canada*, *Robuste* and *Foudroyant*, and the frigates *Melampus*, *Amelia*, *Ethalion*, forty-eight, *Magnanime* and *Anson*, forty-six. The *Hoche* was captured. Of the eight frigates, two, *Romaine* and *Sémillante*, were the only ones to return to our ports.⁴⁰²

The others, namely the *Immortalité*, the *Loire*, the *Embuscade*, the *Bellone*, the *Coquille*, and the *Résolue*, fell into enemy hands. The *Loire*, commanded by Captain Segond, distinguished itself by the energy of its resistance. It was only after five successive engagements that this valiant ship lowered its flag. The *Loire* was running low, its ammunition was exhausted, and almost all of its cannons had been dismantled. On October 12, Commander Savary put to sea with the frigates *Concorde*, *Franchise*, *Médée*, and the corvette *Vénus*. He carried new troops to Ireland. Upon his arrival in Killala Bay, learning that General Humbert, surrounded by superior forces, had capitulated, he headed for France. The ships of his division, driven out by the enemy, dispersed, but all returned to our ports.

We were no more fortunate in India than in the seas of Europe. Of the six frigates which, under the command of Rear-Admiral Sercey, had fought the *Arrogant* and the *Victorieux* in 1796, only the *Prudente*, the *Forte*, and the *Preneuse* remained at the beginning of 1799. Due to the absence of any maritime resources, the Governor-General of the Isle of France and Réunion ceded the *Prudente* to commerce. The latter was cruising when it was encountered by the forty-gun frigate, the *Dædalus*. A battle ensued, the outcome of which was the capture of the French ship. The fight was, moreover, unequal. The *Prudente* did not have the number of cannons it could carry; it had, moreover, detached part of its crew on prizes. The *Preneuse* was attacked, in the vicinity of the Cape of Good Hope, by the *Jupiter* of fifty.⁴⁰³

Captain L'Hermitte, maneuvering with as much audacity as skill, was abandoned by the English ship. *La Preneuse* was returning to the Isle of France, when, upon arriving in sight of Port-Louis, two enemy vessels, one with eighty cannons, and the other with fifty, were reported. This frigate, hugging the land very closely, was driven ashore by a gust of wind. The two vessels approached within cannon range, and the fire they directed at *La Preneuse* did not allow Captain L'Hermitte to refloat her. To avoid an unnecessary loss of men, he had his flag lowered. The English set fire to the French frigate.

La Forte surrendered to the frigate *La Sibil* after a night battle that lasted several hours. The English frigate had twenty-two men out of action, five killed and seventeen wounded. It had only received six cannon shots in its hull and the damage to its masts was insignificant. *La Forte*, dismasted of all its masts, with the body of the ship riddled with cannon shots, had one hundred and forty-five men hit by enemy fire. The number of killed was sixty-five and that of wounded eighty. All the battles at that time presented the same aspect. While streams of blood flowed on our ships, the English lost barely a few men.

There was, at the end of the year 1798, a particular engagement which did the greatest honor to the staff and crew of a French ship. During the month of December, the twenty-four-gun corvette, *Bayonnaise*, returning from Cayenne, was one hundred miles from our coast when it was sighted by the forty-gun English frigate, *Ambuscade*. The *Bayonnaise* moved away under full sail, but was soon joined by the enemy ship, which was making very good progress.⁴⁰⁴

The action began, on both sides, with great vivacity. The outcome seemed beyond doubt. The French corvette had only eight-pounder guns to oppose the twelve-pounder guns and twenty-four-pounder carronades of its adversary. The *Bayonnaise* had already lost many men and sustained serious damage when its captain decided to attempt a boarding. The corvette had, in addition to its crew, thirty soldier passengers. The fighting was within pistol range. The *Bayonnaise*, with a swing of the helm, jammed its main jib bowsprit into the mizzen shrouds of the *Ambuscade*. Sailors and soldiers jumped onto the deck of the frigate. After a short engagement with knives, the English captain had his flag lowered. The French, passing over the *Ambuscade*, which had suffered little, took the *Bayonnaise* in tow. The two ships reached the harbor of the island of Aix a few days later without having seen the enemy. The *Bayonnaise* was commanded by Lieutenant Richer. Wounded during the action, this officer had been replaced by his second in command, Lieutenant Corbie. The latter having been put out of action, command had passed to Ensign Guignier, and, shortly after, the latter having been wounded, to Ensign Danseur. It was this officer who commanded the French corvette when the *Ambuscade* had lowered its flag. A senior infantry officer, Battalion Commander Lerch, a passenger on board the *Bayonnaise*, had particularly distinguished himself in this affair.

The difficulties that had arisen in 1793 between France and the United States of America still persisted.⁴⁰⁵

As a result of the arbitrary measures taken by the court of London, the maritime commerce of the United States was continually harassed and almost destroyed. Instead of speaking out forcefully against the violent actions of the British navy towards its merchant ships, the American government entered into negotiations with Great Britain. On May 19, 1794, it concluded a treaty with that power containing provisions very unfavorable to France. One of the articles stated: "Neither shelter nor refuge shall be granted in their ports to those who have captured the subjects or citizens of either party. But if they are forced, by the weather or the dangers of the sea, to enter their ports, care shall be taken to hasten their departure and have them withdrawn as soon as possible." "This stipulation was in complete disagreement with the clauses of the treaty of 1778, under which French ships and their prizes were to be admitted into the ports of the Union. Finally, what the Washington cabinet took away from us, it conceded to England. The treaty of May 19, 1794, read: "Corsair warships belonging to the said parties respectively shall be permitted to take to any place they wish the vessels and effects taken from their enemies, without being obliged to pay any duty to the officers of the admiralty or other judges whatsoever." On November 18, 1794, the Committees of Public Safety, Finance, and Commerce issued a decree confirming the provisions contained in the decrees of March 9 and July 27, 1793. However, the government soon recognized that the course it was taking could only benefit England by justifying its violence.⁴⁰⁶

On January 3, 1795, a new decree was issued by the Committee of Public Safety concerning the seizure of goods belonging to enemy powers loaded onto neutral vessels. It stated that the commanders of naval forces, divisions, squadrons, fleets, or vessels would consider as null and void the provision of Article 5 of the decree of the Committees of Public Safety, Finance, Commerce, and Supply, dated November 15, 1794, "authorizing the seizure of goods belonging to enemy powers until such time as the latter had declared French goods loaded onto neutral vessels free and unseizable." The decree of January 5, 1795, restored matters to the state they had been in before May 9, 1793. The Directory endeavored, as the conventional government had done, to obtain that the maritime powers show some firmness toward England. Unable to achieve this result, it declared "that the flag of the French Republic would be used, toward neutral vessels, either for confiscation, or for visitation or seizure, in the same manner that they would allow the English to use it toward them."

These discussions, which had been going on since 1793, aroused, on both sides of the Atlantic, very lively irritation. The Washington cabinet complained about the conduct of French warships and privateers. He accused them of molesting the merchant marine of the United States, under the pretext of searching for English ships. The American government sent ships into the Caribbean Sea to protect national commerce. These measures were the result not of the errors committed by our ships, but of the action exercised on the government of the United States by a party opposed to France.⁴⁰⁷

On July 7, 1798, the Americans declared, by legislative act, that they were exempt from the charges imposed on them by the treaty of 1778. Shortly after, their navy received orders to attack our ships. When this news reached France, the government placed an embargo on United States ships in our ports. The war schooner, the *Retaliation*, was captured in the Mediterranean by the frigate *Volontaire*. On February 9, 1799, the thirty-six-gun frigate the *Insurgeante*, captained by Barreaut, had left Guadeloupe a few days earlier to return to Europe and sighted a frigate flying the American flag not far from the island of Nieves. The French frigate, which had just lost its mainmast in a squall, found itself in a situation unfavorable to an encounter. Captain Barreaut believed that the ship in sight had the nationality indicated by its flag. On the other hand, unaware that we were at war with the United States, he allowed himself to be approached without being in full readiness for action. Arriving at a short distance, the *Constellation*, that was the name of this frigate, sent its first volley. Captain Barreaut, convinced that the attack on the American ship was the result of a misunderstanding that an explanation with his commander would put an end to, made the mistake of lowering his flag before having exhausted his means of defense. The *Constellation* carried thirty-six twelve-gun cannons and twelve thirty-two-gun carronades.⁴⁰⁸

II

The disastrous outcome of the Battle of Aboukir had exerted a decisive influence on contemporary events. The Ottoman Porte, hitherto hesitant, had declared itself against us. The court of London had formed a new coalition which included Russia, Austria, and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The English maintained considerable forces in the Mediterranean. Admiral Nelson tightly blockaded Malta. The Egyptian army, completely isolated from France, now seemed reduced to its own resources. The Directory formed a plan to come to its aid. Renouncing action in the North, it resolved to throw all the naval forces of the Republic into the Mediterranean. Orders were given to assemble a squadron at Brest. The Minister of the Navy, Vice-Admiral Bruix, came to this port to hasten the arming of all the vessels in the arsenal. He brought money to pay the crews' wages and to ensure the purchase of equipment of which the port was completely lacking. Vice-Admiral Bruix enjoyed great popularity. Officers and sailors displayed the greatest zeal. In the first days of April 1799, twenty-five vessels were ready to sail. Admiral Bruix took command of them. Fifteen vessels, under the command of Lord Bridport, were cruising off Brest.⁴⁰⁹

On April 25, with the winds blowing from the northeast, a strong breeze, the blockade squadron moved away. Vice-Admiral Bruix left Brest via the Raz de Sein. The French squadron consisted of the following ships: *Océan*, *Invincible*, *Républicain*, the *Terrible*, one hundred and ten, *Formidable*, *Indomitable*, eighty, *Jemmapes*, *Montblanc*, *Tyrannicide*, *Batave*, *Constitution*, *Revolution*, *Fougueux*, *Censeur*, *Zélé*, *Redoutable*, *Wattignies*, *Tourville*, *Cisalpin*, *Jean-Bart*, *Gaulois*, *Convention*, *Duquesne*, *Jean-Jacques-Rousseau*, and *Dix-août*, seventy-four. The *Constitution* and *Censeur* missed their departure. The first of these ships rejoined the fleet the next day; the second went to Cadiz.

The French fleet was sighted on the 26th by the frigate *Nymphe*, which covered itself with sails and set out to search for its admiral. Lord Bridport, informed of our departure, returned in all haste to Brest. Having acquired the certainty that the French squadron had reached the open sea, he detached a ship to carry this news to England and request that prompt reinforcements be sent to him under Cape Clear. Finally, two ships headed south, charged with announcing our departure, one to Vice-Admiral Keith, who was blockading Cadiz, and the other to Count Saint-Vincent. The latter was in Gibraltar where his poor health kept him. After taking these measures, Lord Bridport headed for the coast of Ireland. On the 30th, he arrived in sight of Cape Clear. Rallied by the forces that the British Admiralty had hastened to send to him, he found himself at the head of twenty-six vessels.⁴¹⁰

Vice-Admiral Bruix, wanting to deceive Lord Bridport about his true destination, had sent the chasse-marche, the *Rebecca*, to Ireland, carrying an officer carrying dispatches addressed to the Irish insurgents. This officer had orders not to throw his papers into the sea, in the event, considered certain, that his ship was captured. This chasse-marche was captured by one of the ships joining Lord Bridport. This admiral, convinced that we were attempting a new expedition to Ireland, refused to believe the reports of several merchant ship captains who claimed to have sighted the French squadron at 46 degrees latitude, heading southwest. The French fleet was heading for Cadiz. Admiral Keith was cruising off this port with the ships *Ville-de-Paris*, 110-strong, *Barfleur*, *Prince George*, *London*, *Princess Royal*, 98-strong, *Namur*, 90-strong, *Foudroyant*, *Gibraltar*, 80-strong, *Montagu*, *Northumberland*, *Marlborough*, *Warrior*, *Hector*, *Defence*, and *Majestic*, 74-strong.

On May 3, Admiral Keith was joined by a frigate we had seen off Lisbon, which our fighters had pursued in vain. She informed him of our squadron's departure. On the 4th, the French fleet appeared. The winds, which were blowing very fresh from the west, did not allow the Spanish to leave Cadiz. The English, formed in line of battle, made sail to rise to windward. Vice-Admiral Bruix ranged his ships on the same tack as the enemy, waiting for the weather to be more favorable before engaging in combat. The wind, far from diminishing, increased. On the 5th, at daybreak, our squadron was in disorder. Three ships had disappeared. At ten o'clock in the morning, the *Terrible*, *Wattignies* and *Jean-Bart* were sighted, fleeing before the enemy squadron.⁴¹¹

Vice-Admiral Bruix let the ship bear away to cover them. The English, abandoning the pursuit, returned closest to the wind. Our adversaries, accustomed to the sea, sailed in line without sustaining any damage. It was not the same with our ships. Some had blown sails; others, and this was the majority, were unable to maintain their positions. Vice-Admiral Bruix decided to enter the Mediterranean. On May 14, the French fleet anchored in the harbor of Toulon. The *Batave* and the *Fougueux* had collided a few days earlier; both had serious damage. As soon as our squadron had cleared the strait, Count Saint-Vincent recalled Vice-Admiral Keith. The latter dropped anchor on the 10th off Gibraltar. On the 11th, he set sail for Minorca, where the English forces were to be concentrated. The disappearance of the blockade squadron gave Admiral Mazzaredo freedom of movement. This admiral left Cadiz on May 14th with seventeen ships, heading for the Mediterranean. When he anchored off Cartagena on the 20th, his squadron was, for a long time, unable to undertake anything. Nine ships were dismasted, in whole or in part; the other eight were sinking or had serious damage. A gale, encountered during this short voyage, had been enough to bring about this result.

Vice-Admiral Bruix put to sea again on May 26th with twenty-two ships. He left the *Fougueux* and the *Batave* at Toulon, whose repairs were not finished. Our squadron was carrying food, munitions and some soldiers to the army of Italy. After having brought a convoy of wheat into the port of Genoa, Admiral Bruix anchored, on June 4, at Vado near Savona.⁴¹²

The position of the French fleet, isolated in the Mediterranean, was becoming difficult. It was of the utmost importance that it link up with the Spanish. On June 8th, Admiral Bruix left Vado. After gathering intelligence on enemy movements while passing Toulon, he continued west. On June 22nd, our squadron anchored at Cartagena where it was joined by the *Fougueux* and the *Batave*. The Franco-Spanish army sailed on June 25th, and on July 11th arrived at Cadiz, without having sighted the English. On the 21st, Admirals Bruix and Mazzaredo put back to sea. On August 8, the combined fleet, forty ships strong, anchored in Brest harbor.

Let us go back and see how such numerous squadrons, maneuvering in a confined area, had not met. Count Saint-Vincent, after gathering the forces at his disposal in Minorca, set sail for Toulon on May 22. Learning at sea that the Spanish were at Cartagena, he sailed off Cape San Sebastian to intercept them if Admiral Mazzaredo attempted to link up with Admiral Bruix. On the 30th, one of his patrol boats informed him that the French fleet was no longer at Toulon. If it headed toward the bottom of the Mediterranean, the twelve ships commanded by Nelson would be compromised. Lord Jervis decided to send a reinforcement of four ships to this admiral. A few days later, he himself was joined by a division of five ships, under the command of Admiral Withshed, coming from the Channel squadron.⁴¹³

Count Saint-Vincent, whose health was seriously impaired, returned to Minorca with his ship, the *Ville-de-Paris*, leaving command of the army to Vice-Admiral Keith. On June 3, the latter arrived off Toulon with twenty ships. Having become certain that we had headed east, he headed in that direction. On June 8, off Cape Delle Melle, he received imperative orders from Lord Jervis to turn back. The commander-in-chief of the English fleet ordered him to proceed immediately to the Bay of Rosas. Count Saint-Vincent, convinced that the French squadron was maneuvering to link up with the Spanish, wanted his lieutenant to position himself to fight it before this meeting. At the moment when Admiral Keith received these instructions, Vice-Admiral Bruix was setting sail from Vado. If the English had continued to run along the coast of Italy, an encounter between the two fleets was inevitable. In any case, Vice-Admiral Keith, complying with the orders of Count Saint-Vincent, sailed west with eighteen ships. He had detached the *Bellerophon* and the *Powerfull*, of seventy-four, at Palermo. On the 15th, the English squadron was rallied by the three-decker ship, the *Ville de Paris*. On the 19th, about twenty leagues south of Cape Sicié, his advance guard captured the frigates, *Junon*, *Courageuse*, *Alceste* and the brigs, *Salamine* and *Alerte*. These ships, placed under the command of Rear-Admiral Perrée, came from the coasts of Egypt. Rear-Admiral Perrée, having left Alexandria on April 8, had brought artillery and munitions to the army besieging Saint-Jean-d'Acre. His frigates had, in addition, landed cannons, powder and cannonballs, forming part of their own armament.⁴¹⁴

They were only allowed fifteen rounds per gun. Pursued a few days after completing this mission by superior forces, this division headed towards France. About to reach Toulon, it had the unfortunate fortune to fall into the middle of Admiral Keith's squadron. This admiral, receiving no news of the French fleet, returned to Mahon. On July 7, he was joined by Sir Charles Cotton, who arrived from England with fifteen vessels, seven of which were three-deckers. It was at this moment that Admiral Keith learned of the reunion of the two allied squadrons and their departure from the Mediterranean. He made every effort to supply his fleet. But, forced to anchor at Tetouan to replenish its water supply, it did not arrive in the harbor of Gibraltar until July 29. On the 30th, it crossed the strait at the head of thirty-one vessels. Admiral Keith learned from neutral vessels that the Franco-Spanish fleet had been sighted off Cape Finisterre, heading northeast. The English squadron covered itself with sail to reach it. Arriving off Brest, Admiral Keith saw the French squadron and the fifteen Spanish vessels commanded by Admiral Mazarredo anchored in the harbor.

When news of Admiral Bruix's entry into the Mediterranean reached London, the government recalled Lord Bridport, who, at the end of March, was still waiting for us on the Irish coast with twenty-six vessels. Sixteen ships were sent to Count Saint-Vincent. An English division came to blockade five Spanish ships anchored at Rochefort. The latter, placed under the orders of Admiral Meljarejo, had left Ferrol on April 28. They were to make their junction with the French squadron, which had left Brest on the 24th.⁴¹⁵

Admiral Meljarejo, after a few days cruising, not seeing the French fleet, went to Rochefort. He had not sailed for Brest for fear of finding an enemy squadron off the port. On July 2, Rear Admiral Pole, with five ships, a few frigates, and three bombards, attacked the Spanish division. The latter, supported by French shore batteries and a few gunboats, forced the enemy to withdraw. In the first days of September, Admiral Meljarejo put to sea again. He was not far from Brest when an English squadron was reported. The Spanish headed for Ferrol, which they entered a few days later.

The campaign, made by Admiral Bruix, was well conceived, but it failed due to the weakness of our allies and the inexperience of the officers and crews of our own squadron. Circumstances required that Admiral Bruix maintain sight of the English until the weather was favorable for an engagement. Unable to succeed in this, he lost the opportunity to fight fifteen ships with twenty-four, a number which would have risen to forty, if the Spaniards had been able to leave Cadiz. Once entered the Mediterranean, the French admiral did not dare to venture very far, knowing that once the first moment of surprise had passed, the English would pursue him with superior forces. When he had effected his junction with Admiral Mazzaredo, he went to Cadiz and from there to Brest, taking, to that port, the Spanish squadron as a pledge of an alliance at that moment very shaky. This was the only result of this campaign. One cannot, in fact, be under any illusion about the extent of the services rendered by Admiral Bruix's fleet, by remaining a few days on the coast of Italy.⁴¹⁶

As for the men and munitions it carried to Savona and Genoa, a division of frigates would have fulfilled this mission.

The retreat of the French and Spanish naval forces placed the Mediterranean under the domination of the British Navy. Ships belonging to Lord Jervis's and Nelson's squadrons extended the coast of Italy and supported our enemies' operations. The court of London maintained significant forces at Minorca and Gibraltar. Only a few ships managed to pass through the British fleets unseen.

The *Généreux*, after capturing the *Leander*, had taken his prize to Corfu, then went to Brindisi, on the coast of Calabria, then occupied by the bands of Cardinal Ruffo. On entering this port, the *Généreux* ran aground under the citadel through the fault of its pilot. The first cannon shots killed Captain Lejoille. The *Généreux* was refloated. It cannonaded the town, which its landing companies seized after an engagement of a few hours. This vessel, which had orders to go to Toulon, fortunately made its return to this port. The frigates the *Muiron* and the *Carrère*, as well as the avisos the *Indépendant* and the *Revanche*, set sail from Alexandria on August 23, under the orders of Rear-Admiral Ganteaume. General Bonaparte was on the *Muiron*. The French division, after landing at Ajaccio, on the island of Corsica, anchored in the harbor of Fréjus on October 9. On the 12th, the four ships, then commanded by Captain Larue, entered Toulon. General Bonaparte had left for Paris, taking Rear-Admiral Ganteaume with him.⁴¹⁷

For some time now, the English had been making secret preparations for a landing in Holland. They were counting on the support of the supporters the Prince of Orange retained in that country. The Cabinet of Saint James had secured the cooperation of Russia. This power, to which England was to pay substantial subsidies, had undertaken to provide seventeen thousand men and thirteen vessels, including six ships and five frigates armed en flûte, and two transports. On the 27th of August, the English, soon joined by a Russian force, landed at the mouth of the Texel, under the protection of a squadron of twelve vessels under the command of Admiral Duncan. The land and sea forces were commanded by a prince of the House of England, the Duke of York. A Dutch squadron, led by Rear-Admiral Story, was ordered by Vice-Admiral Andrew Mitchell, commanding a division of the British fleet, to fly the Prince of Orange's ensign. The crews, who had behaved so valiantly at Camperdown, refused to fight. No longer obeyed, Rear-Admiral Story lowered his ensign. He surrendered himself and the officers who remained loyal to the government. The Prince of Orange's ensign was hoisted on the Dutch ships. An English officer, appointed by Vice-Admiral Mitchell, took command of each of them.

Before the necessary measures to repel the invasion could be taken, the Anglo-Russians gained some advantages. But, completely defeated on October 6 by the Franco-Batavian army, then commanded by General Brune, they were forced to retreat.⁴¹⁸

The Duke of York requested an armistice, which was granted. The two commanders-in-chief entered into negotiations. On October 18, a convention was signed, following which the Anglo-Russians re-embarked. The evacuation was to be completed by November 30. The English undertook not to breach the dikes they controlled, which would have allowed them to flood the Batavian Republic over a large area. They also submitted to the obligation to restore the batteries and all military positions that had fallen into their control to the state they were in at the beginning of the expedition. Both sides returned the prisoners taken during the campaign. Finally, it was stipulated that eight thousand prisoners of war, belonging either to France or to Holland, would be released.⁴¹⁹
